

Eurasian Integration *and the* Russian World

Regionalism *as an* Identitary Enterprise

Aliaksei Kazharski



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EURASIAN INTEGRATION
AND THE RUSSIAN WORLD

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*Regionalism as an
Identitary Enterprise*

ALIAKSEI KAZHARSKI



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In memoriam

Vladimir Furs
(1963–2009)

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Foreword

Eurasian integration rose to the status of a prominent topic in both policy-oriented and academic research in 2013, when it suddenly became clear that Russia really cares about bringing Ukraine into what was then the Eurasian Customs Union. As we all know, the zigzags of Kiev's policy between Moscow and Brussels were a major factor behind both the Euromaidan revolution and the subsequent Russian intervention in Ukraine. However, the resulting politicization of the topic has also had negative consequences for the research on Eurasian integration. It is too often viewed through the prism of the 'big' geopolitical questions, either as an instrument of Russia's imperialist expansion or as a goal in itself, Vladimir Putin's dream project which trumps any rationally conceived economic and security interests.

Against this background, Aliaksei Kazharski's book stands out as a welcome attempt to look inside the black box and to understand what the Eurasian project means for the members of the Russian establishment themselves, in their own terms. This move opens up an entirely new perspective. It turns out that research on Eurasian integration does not have to be limited to guesswork about the next probable move of the Kremlin: it can stimulate serious theoretical and methodological reflection.

The research presented in this book concentrates on the perennial question of national identity, but moves the focus beyond the traditional, and already well-researched, problematic of Russia's (non-)

Europeanness. The key question for the book is the question of boundaries—of Russia as a nation and perhaps as a supranational community, as well as of the Eurasian project as such. Boundaries are constructed in space, but this space is not only geographical. It is also political and discursive, and each possible configuration presupposes a different Russia.

As we know from earlier research, Russian national identity discourse is fixated on such concepts as Europe and civilization. This is hardly surprising, given that the predominant ideas about culture and education were shaped by the nineteenth-century Europeanized elites in their never-ending attempts to figure out what to do with their country's otherness. Russia has always tried to position itself within Europe (geographically and culturally), but also has worked to redefine Europe itself, thus contributing to the multiplicity of various definitions of Europeanness that were produced by the (other) Europeans. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, educated Russians have mostly subscribed to the idea of civilization-in-the-singular: for them, there is only one way to be cultured and civilized, and the opposite of "civilization" is thus decadence or outright barbarianism.

The question that has dominated the debate, then, is the question of the boundaries of civilization-in-the-singular: are the standards of civilization set by the West, as liberals would tend to argue, or has the West, as conservatives would contend, lost this privilege due to its moral insolvency? In the former case, Russia needs to continue borrowing from Europe in order to modernize and develop, whereas in the latter, Europe would be seen as slumping into moral decay. There is a long-established conservative discourse in which Russia has preserved the essence of Europeanness and will go on defending civilization against the forces that strive to undermine it.

Characteristically, attempts to disentangle Russian national identity from Europe so far cannot be described as successful. The Bolshevik project, which was supposed to break from the capitalist past directly into the communist future, ended up competing with the West more or less on the old terms. The Eurasianist doctrine, either in its classical version from the 1920–30s, or in its contemporary rendition, remained too obsessed with demonstrating that Russia is not Europe to move beyond Eurocentrism. It did, however, contribute to the establishment in the discursive field of the notion of civilization-in-the-plural—a

Romanticist reformulation of the progressivist agenda of the Enlightenment. Thus, even though Russian conservatives continue to insist on Russia's superior moral standing as the leader of the "civilized world," they also embrace the worldview in which one can be civilized in more than one way. As Kazharski's book shows, all these debates have substantial repercussions in the discussion about Eurasian integration and its future.

Additional complexity is created by the multiple layers of imperial legacies. The Russian empire, as all others, was constantly busy redrawing boundaries within and not just outside. Managing the diverse inner space inhabited by a variety of populations was a formidable task, and failure to cope with the challenge of internal diversity in the context of rapid modernization was a major reason for the collapse of the *ancien régime*. The Soviet Union inherited this mission and tried a few pretty radical innovations, of both violent and peaceful nature. In the end, they also ended in a failure, and the post-Soviet Russia emerged as an entirely new geographical entity, as a nation whose basic parameters had to be redefined or even invented from scratch.

It is hard to say whether it was possible to prevent the Soviet nostalgia from becoming a key element of this new identity, but the fact is that it got established as a nearly universal point of reference, even for those who would gladly leave the Soviet legacy in the past. However, the image of the USSR constructed in the current discourse is first and foremost a reflection of today's concerns. Despite all the problems that haunted the Soviet system, it did provide a sense of historical direction and a forward-looking ideology. This is perhaps the biggest thing that is still missing in Russia nearly 30 years since the end of the Soviet era. The official historical narrative has completely lost any sense of progress, while the government promises at best some marginal improvements in the current standard of living, and otherwise just more of the same.

In the meantime, the space left behind by the successive imperial orders continues to be connected by railways and roads, integrated production chains, as well as by the lasting impact of the Soviet education and mass culture and, significantly, the Russian language as *lingua franca*. The extent to which some of this connectivity is artificially maintained by Russia using its military and economic power is an open question, but comparative analysis demonstrates that empires do not

disappear overnight. The presence of Russian ethnic minorities and the significant social capital they possess in most post-Soviet states, along with labor migration contribute to linking this space together, albeit much less tightly than 30 or even 20 years ago.

A crucial step that Kazharski's book makes is arguing, on the basis of a solid theoretical introduction, that the objectivity of Eurasian space can only be of any importance if it is considered as an integral component of social practices, including the discursive ones. Despite the materiality of the legacies, multiple institutions created by post-Soviet states lingered in the margins of regional politics, let alone global affairs, for the best part of the post-Cold War period. They did have tangible regulatory effects, but ordinary people paid no attention to those as long as they did not see them as relevant in handling the uncertainties that the collapse of the Soviet empire left in its wake. Early post-Soviet regionalisms were about the 'wider Europe', the Northern Dimension, the Arctic – but not much about Eurasia. For better *and* for worse, it is Vladimir Putin who has to be credited for discovering a connection between the idea of Eurasian integration and the concerns of the Russian citizenry, at least as those were voiced by the political class, the media and a significant number of intellectuals.

This is not meant to say that the Eurasian project has been able to effectively solve the problems the Russian society is facing; neither has it been able to gain enough popularity to become a comprehensive identity frame capable of replacing the obsession with Europe. Rather, it gives concrete answers to a limited, but not insignificant, number of questions that the Russian public continued to ask ever since the emergence of the Russian Federation as a sovereign state. Some of these questions are from the category of eternal ones: for example, Eurasian regionalism provides institutional ground to the civilizational claims about Russia as both part of Europe and a self-standing civilization. Others help to make sense of the economic legacies of the USSR: Russia, we are told, are now part of the globalized world, but it enters the world market as the leader of an economic bloc, one of the many that compete for economic leadership.

As Kazharski maintains, the discourses of regionalism, especially of civilizational regionalism, are polysemic rather than strictly ideological. They address a complex and messy reality and organize this complexity into something more meaningful, but still leave space for multiple, and

sometimes contradictory, interpretations. One of the key findings of the book is that this polysemy performs an integrating function in society by helping to bridge and heal some of the divides that were created or widened by the Soviet collapse. As such, it illustrates key poststructuralist points about the social productivity of discourse and undecidability of any social situation. There is always more to the world than can be represented in any more or less coherent scheme: meaning is always in excess, so there is always more to say about everything that we observe or deduce from our analysis.

This is exactly the point where I would like to be slightly more optimistic than the author of this book. He seems to conclude that the Russian discourse of Eurasian integration is completely immersed in the geopolitical frame and therefore cannot but lead to anti-Western isolationism and, consequently, to conflicts with Russia's pro-Western neighbors. There is, however, geopolitics and geopolitics. I wonder what would happen to the Eurasian project if the geopolitics of the EU–Russia relations changes again, as it did in the late 1980s. Would such a change immediately send the Eurasian Economic Union to the dustbin of history? Or could it be reformed to become one of the pillars of Europe whole and free, from Brest to Vladivostok? I do not have a definite answer, but I am grateful to the author for a book that inspires such questions.

Viatcheslav Morozov
Tartu, August 2018

Introduction

In his speech given in 2015 in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, Ivan Krastev commented shrewdly on the failure of the West to understand Russia's strategic behavior. The biggest mistake made by the Western analytical community, he argued, was not so much in the lack of knowledge about Russian history or its economic constraints—it was the failure to understand how Russia sees the West. It is this failure that for the West has been the source of constant “surprises.”¹

The endeavor of this book is very much sympathetic with Krastev's analysis. As a study in international relations it finds realist or other rational choice explanations of Russian behavior at best incomplete. The problem of these approaches tends to be that they ignore the complex dynamics of identity and meaning which over longer periods of time constitute collective perceptions of the Western Other in Russia. These perceptions are in turn always inextricably linked to understandings of the Russian collective Self. To compensate for that reductionism, the book offers a deeper insight into the processes of identity formation that took place in Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. I argue that tracing these processes is quintessential to the understanding of

¹ I. Krastev, 2015 Pierre du Bois Annual Lecture, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, November 18, 2015, http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/relations-publiques/news-at-the-institute/news-archives.html/_/news/corporate/2015/ivan-krastev-russia-is-reverse-e

how and why the Ukraine crisis was possible in the first place. Indeed, a deeper look into them suggests that, though the crisis may have been a “surprise” to us, it was certainly not an accident.

In 2014, as Russian soldiers were assuming control of Crimea, Angela Merkel spoke with Vladimir Putin on the phone. Following the call, she was reported to have said that the Russian president had probably gone out of “touch with reality” and had been residing “in another world.”² Which world exactly could that be?

“Reality,” as many social scientists would probably agree, is an extremely tricky concept. Part of the problem is that the noun can also sometimes come in the plural. The Ukraine crisis—despite some of the official rhetoric about Russia’s “national interest”—was much more than a clash of rationally calculated and rationally understood interests. It was a more fundamental clash of different realities whose growing discrepancy had apparently been overlooked.

For some years the lingering Western image of Russia was that of a country in inevitable transition. Following the end of the Cold War the general expectation was that, sooner or later, it would somehow become a “normal” Western country. These assumptions were not radically challenged, neither after the transition paradigm itself began receiving its share of criticism, nor following the mid-aughts realization that Russia had not exactly been going in the straightforward direction of becoming a liberal democracy. One scholarly approach of the time was to describe it as a “normal” or “pragmatic” European great power, albeit as one that sees itself and others more through the categories of the nineteenth rather than the twenty-first century, still being keen on things like spheres of influence and great power management. But some changes at least were thought to be irreversible. Prominent observers found it safe to argue that Russia would never go back to using force to protect its ethnic minorities abroad. An unfortunate prediction, as we know now.

Linear models of transition are seducing because they are both simple and reassuring. But the “surprise” of the Ukraine crisis reminded us that Russia’s story was probably much more complex.

² I. Traynor, and Wintour, P., “The Ukraine Crisis: Vladimir Putin Has Lost the Plot, Says German Chancellor,” *The Guardian*, March 3, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/03/ukraine-vladimir-putin-angela-merkel-russian>.

If the West is seen as the ultimate reference point for Russia, in the long term, its movement looks like less of a straight line and more like a pendulum. It is a pendulum that oscillates inside a particular love–hate relationship. Iver Neumann once described Russia’s position vis-à-vis Europe as that of a permanent pupil or learner (Neumann 1999). But historically the submissive posture of a pupil has given way quite regularly to an arrogant and defying one. These cycles of a love–hate relationship are also known for exhibiting strong contrast. In just a little more than thirty years that followed since the beginning of Perestroika in the Soviet Union, Russia proceeded from its role as the global alternative to Western modernity to an avid learner of Western standards and then back into the position of a challenger of Western liberal democratic norms—but this time from the right.

These oscillations of Russia’s foreign policy also tend to echo cycles of change in domestic political order which can seem even more abrupt. Periodic collapses of the traditionally centralized Russian state are well-known facts of history. In 1917 the old Russia “shed itself in two days” in the words of the philosopher Vasily Rozanov, who was bemused by the sudden miraculous collapse of those traditional institutions of Russian life which had always seemed permanent. Likewise, the USSR disappeared in 1991 almost overnight. The state that had not long ago appeared all-powerful and, for all practical purposes, eternal simply vanished into thin air. Few, if any actively objected.

It is not hard to see that the paradox of sudden ruptures in the Russian domestic political order is directly linked to oscillations of its stance toward the West. Russia’s internal debate on “Europe” has always been pivotal to the debate on its domestic political order. In Neumann’s words, when Russians set out to discuss Europe, they also discuss themselves (Neumann 1996). And at least to some extent, the sways of the love–hate relationship with can be explained by the traditional structure of this order. The historically high centralization of power ensured that any modernization or Westernization in Russia would typically start as a predominantly top-down initiative orientated toward radical societal change. This was the case of Peter the Great’s reforms at the dawn of the eighteenth century. This equally applies to Gorbachev’s Perestroika which again turned Russians into Europe’s enthusiastic pupils in no time.

There is, in truth, no miracle about the contrasting cycles of embracing and rejecting the West in Russia. Everything happens for a

reason. Shifts in Russia's self-perceptions—which are traditionally inseparable from its perceptions of the West—may seem radical, but they are prepared by longer antecedent processes in which the ruling class typically plays a key role. “The making of Russian policy is dependent on what sort of political project its politically leading citizens want Russia to be” (Neumann 1996, p. 1). The existing political hierarchy presents extraordinary opportunities to shape the broader public opinion in Russia in accordance with its current political project.

Those assumptions are also maintained throughout this particular book. Researched and written shortly in the wake of the 2014 “surprise” it naturally takes it as a point of reference, as well as an invitation to overhaul our knowledge about Russia. The shock and awe evoked by the unprecedented behavior of the Kremlin, which, for the first time since World War II in Europe, openly annexed a neighbor's territory, should not confuse or distract us from examining the longer-term processes that led up to these dramatic events. Contra the assumption that post-Cold War Russia had to inevitably become a “normal country”—that is, a liberal democratic nation-state that follows the Western template—in this book I argue that discourses of the ruling Russian establishment have been constructing a very different national identity. It is an identity that has been based on notions of Russia as a supranational rather than a national community.

An open challenge to the European security architecture and the post-World War II Helsinki principles of settled borders in Europe and the readiness to withstand Western sanctions, which came in consequence of that, may only seem like irrational or “surprising” behavior if one ignores the longer-term processes of identity constitution. In the Ukraine crisis, interests understood rationally, arguably took a back seat to the more fundamental clash of Russian and Western “realities.” What we found out is that Russian notions of the Self (still) do not fit into Western assumptions that Russia is “just another country” that can be expected to follow Western norms of conduct. And the skyrocketing domestic support for Putin in the midst of the Ukraine crisis suggested that the Russian president was not residing in this different “reality” all by himself.

As this book argues, the long tradition of Russian exceptionalism has been successfully carried by its present establishment into the twenty-first century. The empirical findings presented here demonstrate that in the past decades, alongside Russia's official identity as Russian

Federation, Russian identity has been constructed by two widespread establishment discourses. I isolate them as discourses of cultural and economic regionalism. They correspond to two grand geopolitical projects, i.e., that of the *Russian world* or *civilization* and that of the Eurasian economic integration or the *Eurasian Union*.

Despite being rather different in the type of vocabulary they draw on, both of these discourses share structural similarities. They both represent Russia as a supranational rather than a national community, a community that, when understood in geographical terms, transcends the internationally recognized borders of the present-day Russian Federation. They also secure for Russia a special status globally, implying that Russia is not an ordinary country among other countries, but the core and leader of an economic or cultural bloc of countries. Finally, both types of regionalist discourse—despite their differences—make extensive and systematic references to the “West” or “Europe” as symbolic figures against which Russia’s identity continues to be delineated.

Interpretations of Russia as a cultural or economic *region*, as opposed to “just another” nation-state, are thus the point in which the Russian and the Western “realities” tend to clash. It is for this reason that the so-called regional rivalry between European Union’s Eastern Partnership initiatives and Russia’s project of the Eurasian Union became so bitter and ultimately detrimental to all the players involved. One, therefore, should not be deceived by the nonpolitical semblance of regional economic integration issues in Eastern Europe, as in fact they were heavily charged with geopolitical and identity significations. Tracking down their signifiers in order to hold them accountable is what this book is mainly about.

The book is structured into seven chapters. Chapter 1 reviews the state of art and spells out the book argument in more detail. It shows how cultural and economic regionalisms can both be tackled as identity enterprises of a great power that is suffering from identity uncertainty. It outlines the similarities but also important differences between the two regionalizing discourses and the implications they have for identity-building strategies. Chapter 2 discusses in more detail the approach to studying identity formation under the specific circumstances of the Russian Post-Soviet condition as a quasi-post-modern one. It shows how the use of an often self-contradictory variety of discursive resources is combined with a hierarchical organization

of power, discourse and identity production. I also briefly outline the theoretical and methodological tenets of the study in that chapter, as deduced from the hierarchical model of discourse which I adopt following Bourdieu's sociological insights. Chapter 3 moves on to a closer examination of cultural regionalism. It discusses civilizationism as a broad discursive phenomenon in Russian intellectual life, as well as the reasons for its resurgence during the Post-Soviet years. An overview of intellectual precursors to the official narrative of the Russian world is also provided here. Chapter 4 then proceeds to examining the official discourses for the period of 2007–2013. The chapter demonstrates how adopting the civilizational discourse the Russian establishment pursued an identity-building strategy, aimed at suturing the multiple “cracks” or fragmentations in Russia's identity caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The tight nexus between domestic and foreign policy is exposed here, as the Russian civilization project is treated at the same time as an attempt to construct a cultural region around Russia and to reconstitute Russian identity after the perceived trauma of the disintegration in 1991. Chapter 5 carries on with this line of analysis by showing how the civilizational discourse harbors both a nativist conservative domestic political project for Russia and a number of foreign policy projections that strive to redefine Russia's global status and its stance vis-à-vis the Western Other. Chapters 6 and 7 switch from cultural to economic regionalism to analyze the discourses around the Eurasian Union project as the alternate version of Russia's supranational identity. The chapters demonstrate how the Russian establishment constructs Eurasian integration by plugging into the globally established discourses of economic regionalism. The argument put forth in these chapters is that this strategy implies Russia's partial identification with the Western (neoliberal) hegemony in which these discursive resources are embedded. Extensive references to the European integration experience in the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism thus play a twofold role. They both function as a traditional othering of Europe performed through the European Union as its symbolic proxy as well as strive to redefine European integration as a nodal point of the global neoliberal discourse. And as Chapter 7 in particular demonstrates, Russian otherings of European integration can also overlap with the culture based nativist discourse that emphasizes Russia's distinct and independent stance vis-à-vis the West.

CHAPTER 1

Regionalism as a Russian Identity-Building Project

This chapter outlines an argument which is pivotal to this book. It shows that examination of identity-construction processes in Russia is crucial if we also want to understand the causes of recent security challenges in Eastern Europe. The 2014 Ukraine crisis was a crisis of expertise on Russia that forces us to rethink some of our basic notions. Those notions may have lingered due to the inertia of knowledge. For some time at least it was assumed that Russia, like all post-Communist countries, is in transition toward a Western liberal democratic model of statehood. This model was indeed part of its official identity, inscribed among other in its constitution. Yet, a review of its recent discourses suggests that behind this façade the Russian establishment has been steering its country toward something rather different. The chapter argues that a social constructivist examination of identity-building practices is necessary to understand Russian behavior. Without it conventional analyses, such as those which have been provided by members of the realist camp, remain incomplete. While operating with categories like “national security” and “interest” they fail to see that these categories are not absolute. On the contrary, these categories depend in their definition on the images of “self” and “other” that happen to dominate the domestic debate.

The chapter argues that the Russian notions of the “self” that have crystallized in recent years revolve around the image of a supra-national entity that is equal in its status to the collective “West” that

functions as Russia's constitutive other. This supranational identity has been socially constructed through discourses of cultural and economic regionalism. One discourse portrays Russia as the leader of a regional economic bloc, the other as a core of a distinct civilization. Thus in this case Russian identity is being defined through a peculiar form of region building, not nation building. I further provide an explanation of how macroregions come to be socially constructed as midlevel spatial units of the global order. Differences notwithstanding, Russian economic and cultural discourses are both parallel attempts to construct a spatially delineated supranational community. I therefore place them in the same analytical category of regionalism. To examine the simultaneous processes of region building and identity construction I rely on a broad sample of official discourses that are documented between 2007 and 2013. This sample is interpreted through a theoretical framework of discourse analysis, which is explained in the concluding section of the chapter.

Russian identity, Ukrainian crisis, and the end of the transition metaphor

One important intention of this book is to bring the issue of Russian identity into the current international relations debates that have evolved in the wake of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. The central argument is that examining processes of Russian identity formation that have been happening in a complex Self/Other relation with the West are paramount to a full and correct understanding of the recent dynamics of Russian foreign policy. The study, thus, picks up on an already established debate in international relations literature about the role of "Europe" or the "West" in Russian identity formation. This debate hinges on relational and socially constructed theoretical notions of collective national identities, and conceives of identity as a process that happens inside a dynamic relationship between the self and its constitutive other(s). This particular debate is itself embedded in a broader constructivist tradition of thought within the discipline of international relations associated with work of scholars such as Wendt (1992; 1999), Campbell (1992; 1998), Ashley and Walker (1990), Hopf (1998), Der Derian (1987; 1989), Ringmar (1996), Neumann (1999) and others.

Iver Neumann's work on the evolution of the "idea of Europe" as a traditional "staple" of Russian intellectual life can be considered pioneering as far as the introduction of the Self/Other nexus into the study European-Russian relations is concerned. In his analysis of Russian intellectual debates Neumann demonstrates how the constitutive role of the European "other" in Russian reflections on the collective self has taken a form of a long-term identitary dependence, Russian identity being, as he famously argues, "actually caught up in the relationship with Europe." It is in virtue of that dependence that "Russians, when they set out to discuss Europe, also discuss themselves" (Neumann 1996, p. 1). Using the Russian/European Self/Other relationship Neumann traces how the Other becomes the constant symbolic figure against which the Self is differentiated and infused with essential characteristics. In a follow-up study (1999) Neumann demonstrates that, as far as Europe and Russia are concerned, reliance on a symbolic other for constituting the self has been mutual. As the construction of otherness is instrumental to the making of the self, Neumann speaks of "uses" of others as symbolic figures that are necessary for identity constitution.

Neumann writes that "the main metaphor used in European discussions of Russian politics and economics has been that of transition" (Neumann 1999, p. 110). Below I suggest that this "metaphor" continues to reflect the case and that with respect to its historical "significant other" Russia has not left its traditional ambiguous state of "liminality." Throughout the post-Soviet period of its history it did not implement the Westernizer program and did not recognize itself as being irrevocably a part of the collective West, although the West per se certainly remained the object of its primary concern. As Lo put it with respect to the Yeltsinite period, "Russian foreign policy was overwhelmingly Westerncentric, although not pro-Western" (Lo 2002, p. 8). Russia has thus preserved a close attachment to the West and a sense of standing apart from it, a sense that is not only a subjective feeling, but is underpinned by a number of structural factors.

The "transition metaphor" remained popular with many scholars throughout the post-Soviet period. Some of them were quick to announce that the Putinite period of history made the process of Russia's transition to being a "normal" Western power irreversible. Published in 2006, the work of Dmitry Trenin (presently director and then senior expert of the

Carnegie Moscow Center), argued that Russia was now the “new West” and had to live up to this status. “Integrating” with the West for Russia meant not so much formal membership in Western institutions, as the task of “internal modernization” that would bring Russia up to date with the global standards of the postindustrial society” (Trenin 2006).

Trenin saw the transformations of the early Putinite period in Russia as “fundamental” and implying “the end of the imperial period in its history.” “With the disintegration of the Soviet Union Russia as ‘Eurasia,’ as a closed self-sufficing entity, became history” (ibid., pp. 141–142; see also Trenin 2011 for similar arguments). “In terms of values,” argued Trenin, Russia’s “alternativity” to the West has been removed (ibid., p. 149). Russia remaining a “European country” differed from other countries in Europe only in the autocratic nature of its government and the economic and social backwardness (ibid., p. 170). And though, as Trenin observed, there were some international tensions with regard to the status of Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics, “one can contend that there will be no coming back to the practice of eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, when Russia not only declared but also implemented its ‘right to protect’ its brothers in faith in Poland and in the Ottoman empire, will not see a comeback” (ibid., p. 201).

Trenin’s last conclusion certainly strikes us now as premature and exceedingly optimistic. One essential thing that the “Westernizer” scholarly narrative seems to have missed is that the political program of “internal modernization” in Russia under the existing circumstances did not have to be completed. Neither did it have to be entirely synonymous with becoming the “new West,” as its understanding did not have to be fully congruent with the Western understanding of “modernization.” In fact, as scholars subsequently argued, it is exactly in interpreting what “modernization” means that substantial differences have emerged in relations between Russia and the European Union (see Romanova and Pavlova 2013).

Students of Russian politics such as Sakwa argued that, under Vladimir Putin, Russia’s project of modernization turned out to be “a system of partial adaptation” to Western standards. It integrated the country into the international economy, but, at the same time, appealed to a “Russian political culture,” was shaped “by security concerns” and maintained that, in terms of adapting to the West, “excessive adaptation could be as dangerous as too little.” Therefore, observed Sakwa,

“the strategy of partial adaptation is a balancing act torn by its inherent dualism. On the one hand, it looks to the norms and standards prevalent in the countries of advanced modernity; on the other, it seeks to root the adaptive process in a native discourse (managed and interpreted, of course, by the regime) while refusing to succumb to nationalist insularism” (Sakwa 2010, p. 25).

Tsygankov suggests that, during Putin’s second term, Russia’s stance did not turn confrontational, but it did become “much more assertive” with the 2007 Munich security conference speech being a “high point” in this “new assertiveness” (Tsygankov 2010, p. 223). Furthermore, Russia’s international self-positioning remained connected to its approach to its own domestic politics. Namely, internationally voiced protests against “unipolarity” came in a nexus with reservations about the hegemony of Western liberal standards. Putin was, therefore, “clear that while moving in the same direction of freedom and democracy as Europeans, Russia does so at its own pace and given its own conditions” (*ibid.*, p. 226). Then, the Russian concern with unipolarity has, of course, never been of an abstractly theoretical nature. Starting from Yeltsinite times, as Lo argues, the motivation to produce various doctrinal alternatives to “unipolarity” such as “multilateralism, multipolarity and diversification” was “fundamentally West-centric,” stemming from a concrete concern about “an American-centered unipolarity” (Lo 2002, p. 95).

The desire to hedge in against “unipolarity” in the international system and to leave open a back door in the interpretation of domestic political standards could then be seen as two sides of Russia’s relationship with its constitutive Other. Also, the ambiguity, or “dualism” of “partial adaptation” to the West has to do with the fact that reluctance to altogether embrace the West comes in combination with the persisting importance of securing recognition from it in this form or another. The deep-seated concern with *status* comes in as a crucial factor of identity formation. Thus, for instance, Morozov argues that contemporary Russia’s identity depends critically on “its (post)imperial self-image as a great power, where ‘greatness’ is still defined by reference to the Soviet past” (Morozov 2013a, p. 16). Wary of complete identification, it cannot eschew the “West” as an ultimate reference point for standards of the Self, and, therefore, hovers in a kind of an ambiguous identitary “gray zone.”

Transitologists see post-Communist transitions as multifaceted processes that simultaneously involve more than one dimension (see Offe 2004). Based on existing studies one can argue that Russia's position in the transition process has been ambiguous or undecided with respect to several aspects, including governance and institutions (see Taylor 2011; Kononenko and Moshes 2011; Petrov 2011), regime type (Petrov, Lipman and Hale 2010), and economics (Derluguian 2011; Holmes 2006; Inozemtsev 2011).

One aspect that is of particular interest here is the process of Russian nation building, which, as some would argue, became caught in a dilemma between ethnonationalist and imperialist self-definitions. Here, contrary to what Trenin (2006) suggested, Russia's departure from its "imperial period of history" may not be a process that is linear or irrevocable. As Makarychev, for instance, argues, the "imperial role identity" continues to be one of the "competing" interpretations of "Russia's collective Self" (Makarychev 2013b, p. 115). The transition from an empire to a sovereign nation-state can, thus, be argued incomplete. As the father of Russian market reforms, Yegor Gaidar, suggested, post-Soviet Russia effectively remained in the gray zone between its formal identity as a federated nation-state and its historically more habitual form of existence, namely a "territorially integrated empire." The latter bears a principle difference to colonial empires in that its colonies are "not separated from the metropolis by seas. The ethnic groups that dominate in the metropolis and satellite territories live side by side and interact closely" (Gaidar 2007, p. xi).

Russia's historical case is unique insofar as its empire did not sink into oblivion along with other European territorially integrated empires such as Austria-Hungary, but was "restored in different, Communist, almost unrecognizable form in the period 1917–21" (ibid.). The peaceful breakup of the USSR in 1991, Gaidar argues, made it possible for the authorities to "avert bloodshed and nuclear catastrophe," but "it did not avert the pain caused by the disintegration of the territorially integrated empire" (Gaidar 2007, p. xv). And as Gaidar warned the Russian public in 2006, nostalgia for territorially integrated empires is stronger than for overseas colonial empires. Russia's acute political hypersensitivity in regards to the affairs of former imperial territories has in fact taken the form of a peculiar dependence. This dependence limits the extent to which Russian Federation can be seen as a sover-

eign nation-state, where identity and territoriality are, in principle, congruent. For when it comes to Russia's "near abroad" there suddenly appears to be no stabilized separation into the inside and the outside.

Russia's symbolic dependence on former imperial territories can, thus, paradoxically be seen as inhibiting its capacity to complete its transition to a sovereign nation-state. One key implication of the uncertainty of its self-delineation as a nation is, arguably, the limited—or conditional—analytical value of categories such as "national interest" for understanding contemporary Russia's international conduct, as, in fact, its approaches to policymaking and its perception of "interests" can only be correctly interpreted in the context of broader identity agendas.

The ambiguity or uncertainty of contemporary Russia's identity as a state, thus, involves an ambiguity in its very spatial, territorial self-delineation. This has key implications for its relations both with the adjacent former imperial territories and with the "West" as its constitutive other. Furthermore, the two issues can overlap and become one, as it happened in the case of the EU–Russia rivalry over their "competitive neighborhood" (Kobzova, Popescu and Wilson 2011).

Based on the arguments presented above, I conclude that identity based approaches to international politics still bear strong relevance for students of contemporary Russia and its international conduct. As I earlier suggested, traditional analytical vocabularies, stemming from conventional approaches to international politics, such as those of national interest or national security, may have limited analytical capacity when the very meaning of the national self remains uncertain and ambiguous. In this situation an observer is prone to suspect latent identity agendas being diffused throughout most key foreign policy moves, as well as to anticipate with a higher degree of probability that the seemingly neutral, depoliticized issues of international politics will suddenly be infused with identity.

Russian foreign policy and the limits of rational choice analysis

I contend that rational choice models such as realism are insufficient for exhaustive explanations of Russian behavior. Existing literature suggests that, when it comes to Russia's international conduct, the choice

of theoretical framework is, generally speaking, far from self-evident. Thus, Igor Torbakov points at the traditional existence of “two diametrically opposite schools” that have disagreed fundamentally on the status of ideas in their interpretation of Russian foreign policy. One would portray Russia’s foreign policy as shaped by its current official ideology, whereas the other would see Russia as a pragmatic actor driven by *raison d’état*. The constructivists try to reconcile the inside-out and outside-in approaches by explaining interests as being defined through the prism of national identity. Yet, the problem, as Torbakov remarks, much in line with what has been already said, is precisely that “post-Soviet Russia’s identity is not clearly defined” (Torbakov 2013).

Recent dynamics of Russian foreign policy have been subject to this debate of paradigms. Below I examine one instance of a realist argumentation in some detail in order to demonstrate its insufficiency.

Mearsheimer (2014) puts forth a realist explanatory narrative according to which the West had been moving into Russia’s backyard and threatening its core strategic interests through continuously enlarging the EU and NATO eastward. The invocation of rhetoric on cultural and spiritual kinship—the discourse on protection of “compatriots”¹ and “Russian speakers”² that accompanied the 2014 intervention in Ukraine—was only a reaction to structural changes in the regional and global balance of power that Russia’s strategic counterparts had worked to introduce. Consequently, Mearsheimer dismisses the idea that Crimea was seized “out of a long-standing desire to resus-

¹ As stated in the 2014 decision allowing the use of Russian armed forces in Ukraine, issued by Russia’s Federation Council in response to Putin’s plea. (POSTANOVLENIYE SOVETA FEDERATSII FEDERAL’NOGO SOBRANIYA ROSSIYSKOY FEDERATSII Ob ispol’zovanii Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii na territorii Ukrainy [RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION OF THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION On the use of armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine]. The Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, March 1, 2014. <http://council.gov.ru/activity/documents/39979>. Accessed October 1, 2014).

² In particular, Putin used the term “Russian-speaking population.” (Vladimir Putin otvetil na voprosy zhurnalistov o situatsii na Ukraine [Vladimir Putin answered the journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine]. President of Russia, March 4, 2014. <http://kremlin.ru/news/20366>. Accessed October 1, 2014.)

citate the Soviet empire,” thus, refuting the possibility that Russia’s geopolitical vision was underpinned by ideological or identity reasons. The logic of strategic calculation black-boxes the potential symbolic importance of territories such as Crimea. In the end, annexing Crimea is vital for the Kremlin because of its general implications for national security—which are carefully calculated—and not due to the particular role it may play in Russian collective memory and identity (*ibid.*).

This view is unavoidably limited, as it leaves out the fact that foreign policy agendas are about much more than just strategic calculation. Their symbolism enjoys varying degrees of domestic attention and popularity. Thus the 2014 adventure in Ukraine was met with an unprecedented upsurge of domestic support for policies of the Russian ruling class. Support was documented by both progovernment and independent sociological services.³ There are various signs suggesting that Crimea and the “compatriots” abroad are agendas that secure an extraordinary degree of national unification and mobilization.

Incidentally, not all foreign policy agendas manage to secure domestic consolidation. Vladimir Putin’s 2011 commitment to building a “Eurasian Union,” made as part of his presidential campaign, for instance, was followed shortly by unprecedented popular protest and a hitherto unknown crisis of regime legitimacy, which outside observers dubbed “the end of the Putin consensus” (Judah and Wilson 2012). The soaring popularity that the Russian rulers experienced in 2014 suggests that a new political “consensus” was indeed in the making, forged around the identity agenda of protecting and reunifying the securitized “Russian world.”⁴

³ According to polls conducted by the Levada-Center, 88% and 90% of Russia supported the “unification” of Crimea with Russia in March and May 2014, correspondingly. (The survey was carried out among 1,600 people, statistical error not exceeding 3.4%.) Available from Levada.ru: <http://www.levada.ru/eng/crimea>. Accessed October 1, 2014.

⁴ Here, observing the choice of language becomes important. The usage of the word “reunification” signals an underlying notion of preexisting unity that is being restored. Thus, in his address to the parliament and civil society representatives in March 2014, Vladimir Putin declared that “the overwhelming majority of Crimea’s inhabitants and the absolute majority of citizens of the Russian Federation support the *reunification* [vossoedinenie] of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol with the Russian Federation” (Obrash-

In a sense, the realist narrative is correct in describing Russian conduct as a reaction to a “core interest” being threatened. What it misses, though, is the ability to understand how this “core interest” is constituted.

Mearsheimer, remaining true to the tradition of realist thought, adheres to the static notion of world politics where interests and threats are taken for granted. Consequently, he argues,

Putin’s actions should be easy to comprehend. A huge expanse of flat land that Napoleonic France, imperial Germany, and Nazi Germany all crossed to strike at Russia itself, Ukraine serves as a buffer state of enormous strategic importance to Russia. No Russian leader would tolerate a military alliance that was Moscow’s mortal enemy until recently moving into Ukraine. Nor would any Russian leader stand idly by while the West helped install a government there that was determined to integrate Ukraine into the West. (Mearsheimer 2014)

The weaker side of Mearsheimer’s argument is apparently the fact that he is unable to explain why “the West” necessarily has to remain a “mortal enemy” to Moscow after the end of the Cold War. He seems to merely take that fact for granted, deducing it from the perennial wisdom of realist thought about the “essence” of world politics. Thus, he writes, “the crisis there [in Ukraine] shows that realpolitik remains relevant—and states that ignore it do so at their own peril.

cheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Address of the President of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia, March 18, 2014. <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/20603>. Accessed October 1, 2014). Technically speaking, the two entities could never have been *reunited* with the Russian Federation because they were never part of this political entity. Thus, the implied assumption was that Russia as it exists in its present-day legally defined borders, is only a proxy for the broader “Russian world” (or “historical Russia”) that Putin invokes later on in the same speech drawing an analogy with the 1989 reunification of Germany. “I trust it that the Europeans will get us right, above all the Germans. [...] Our country [...] unequivocally supported the sincere and irrepressible yearning of the Germans for national unity. I am sure you have not forgotten that, and I count on the citizens of Germany also supporting the urge of the Russian world, of the historical Russia, to restore unity.”

US and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border" (ibid.).

Alexander Wendt in his seminal critique of realism argued that power politics is itself a socially constructed reality that the states themselves continue to reproduce—and not a naturally predefined mode of interaction between states (Wendt 1992). One could also argue the relationship between constructivist and realist explanation strategies is not necessarily of the zero-sum game type. Their analyses reach different degrees of what Wendt (2001) calls "causal depth." Explaining the behavior of actors based on their preferences and identities, and accounting for the formation of the latter can be seen as distinct analytical tasks for international relations scholars.

Following up on Mearsheimer—the insights of the constructivist critique allow his analysis of Russian behavior to be granted some explanatory power, but he could be reprimanded for—using Wendt's formula—having allowed an "analytical stance" to become an "ontological stance," or, in other words, for subscribing to the view that one can "derive a self-help structure of identity and interest from the principle of anarchy alone" (Wendt 1992). Mearsheimer's take seems to be right in pointing out the deep-seated perception of Western actions as a threat to its "core interests." By naturalizing the realist logic that presumably underpins the Russian response, it misses the chance to explain why exactly these particular "core interests" are in place, and how it is necessary that the "West" comes to be a threat to these interests—except by making reference to the Cold War memory of being Russia's "mortal enemy." That is an argument that may very well be valid, but its historicism is not particularly characteristic of the atemporal gaze on international politics championed by Mearsheimer's own paradigm of realism.

I used Mearsheimer's argument, first of all, as a demonstration of the difficulties that explanatory narratives on Russia's international conduct run into, when they ignore the analytical toolkit of constructivist thought. This relates to my earlier point about identity ambiguity and the commonplace categories of "national interest" and "national security" being analytically problematic in the case of post-Soviet Russia. As things stand, to understand Russian conduct is ultimately to understand the identity agenda that underpins it. Consequently, no causal account can be given to it without looking into

ways in which Russia's collective self is being produced and reproduced through discursive practices.

Russian supranationalism and the social construction of regions

The gist of my argument in this book is that over the past years the Russian establishment has engaged in discursive practices that construct Russia as a supranational entity rather than a nation-state. I also contend that this supranationalism is best understood as *regionalism*, and that it comes in two major guises, namely cultural and economic regionalism. These forms of regionalism function as alternatives to Russia's identity as a nation-state.

In their 2011 analysis Makarychev and Morozov provide a taxonomy of Russian foreign policy doctrines. They divide them into two subgroups, which they label "state-centric" and "state plus" strategies. The state-centric strategies hinge on the notion of a sovereign state being the primary actor of world politics, and, therefore, include notions such as "multilateralism" or "great power management." The "state plus" strategies, on the other hand, shift their focus of attention to entities that transcend the power of nation-states. Among the "state plus" strategies the authors list *polycentrism* ("situations of multilayered and diffuse governance" in a globalized world), *multiregionalism* (parts of the world grouped into distinct regional orders) and a *dialog of civilizations* (with "Russia standing as one of the world's civilizations, possessing its own distinctive cultural profile in the world") (Makarychev and Morozov 2011, pp. 366–367). The latter two approaches come to be particularly popular with the Russian establishment as they go well with Russia's antihegemonic doctrine of "multipolarity" and the concerns about global Western domination from which this doctrine ultimately stems (see Lo 2002, p. 95). In other words, to the Russian establishment multiregionalism and multicivilizationism are a response to the "unipolar" world created by the Western Other.

I thus argue that by constructing a new identity the Russian establishment is also engaged in a form of region building. In other words, we can talk about projects of cultural and economic regionalism that are being put forth as part of a politics of identity. Thus, there is a two-

fold process of social construction. Identity is being constructed but also regions are being constructed. From the social constructivist point of view this is a completely feasible assumption. Regions, just like other social entities, are not naturally defined units but human-made constructs or artifacts of human activity.

As part of the argument I also propose to categorize both the economizing and the culturalist (or civilizationist) discourses of the Russian establishment as forms of region building. While doing so for the discourse of regional economic integration is unlikely to arouse any question, the inclusion of culturalist discourses into the category of regionalism may be disputed. Below I provide a discussion on the social construction of regions and justify the inclusion of culture and economics into this common analytical category. I first discuss the social construction of economic regionalism and then proceed to cultural regionalism.

The social construction of Eurasian economic integration may be driven by local concerns and embedded in region-specific political and cultural contexts. At the same time, it can be seen as an element of a global trend toward economic region building. Thus, for the Russian establishment, invoking the discourse of economic regionalism implies plugging into an array of broader, globally established ideologies and discourses that are working to organize global space. Existing scholarship suggests that over the second half of the twentieth century regionalism became a global discourse, being originally inspired by the initial success of European integration. Though not owned by either the United States or Europe, this discourse is an important element of the Western neoliberal hegemony. The EU occupies a privileged position as a symbol, a model or perceived universal standard of regional integration. In this discourse regional integration is seen as a universal, ubiquitous process that divides up the global space into regional units of economic governance. Seminal works of the English school reflected on regional integration, as one contemporary international trend that could pave way to an alternative world order composed of units other than sovereign nation-states—as well as characterized by a style of interaction other than power politics (Bull 1997, p. 255). Bull also pointed out the special role that European integration “example” plays in structuring discussions of regional integration. At the same time, he acknowledged the limited scope of its actual impact on the transformation of global

and regional architecture. Practically, this meant the European community may well have been a globally important politically mobilizing symbol, and, at the same time, have remained a “freak occurrence” in the global system rather than a model that paves way for any serious transformations. Indeed, if by the mid-1960s European integration suffered “a slowdown in the progress” of its movement, regionalist economic arrangements outside Europe that attempted to imitate the European model resulted in a “near total failure” (Hurrell 2007, p. 240).

Nevertheless, one result of the upsurge of regional integrations was that regionalism had established itself as a broadly recognizable discourse. “The study of regional communities,” observed Etzioni in the preface to his 1965 comparative study of regionalisms,

whether of states, cities, or tribes, has gained growing attention from political scientists, students of public administration, sociologists, and economists. The success of the European Economic Community has provided added interest. In every part of the world efforts are being made to develop broader political communities, and studies of the factors that make for the success or failure of these communities are a new and expanding spatiality. Regular sessions are devoted to regionalism at meetings and international associations and in seminars at leading universities. In addition to the publishing of a journal specifically reporting on common market studies, other journals are devoting increasing space to the subject of regionalism. All these developments indicate the growing volume of work in this area. (Etzioni 1965, p. lvii)

Published in the same year, Joseph Nye’s study of failed East African regionalism also reflects on the distance between the roles of the European Community as a symbol that structures the discourse and as a practically applicable model.

How do you integrate a number of states? For much of man’s history, force was the answer. More recently, Europe has captured the imagination with new methods of integration. Journalist, theorists and African leaders have all generalized from the European experience. Jean Monnet, President of the Action Committee for a United States of Europe, argues that Europe’s “new insti-

tutional method” is “permanently modifying relations between nations and men.” But the heavy coat of European theory needs alteration before it can be worn in African climates. (Nye 1965)

It is thus possible to argue that in the wake of the initial success of European regional integration, regionalism was also established as a globally recognizable and legitimate discourse, broadly reproduced by “journalists, theorists and leaders” alike. Inter alia, this involved the establishment of regionalism studies as an academic field, and development of a favorable normative bias both in the scholarly and policymaking environments. As Fawcett, for example, argues, for “those concerned with international order” regionalism is usually at the center of a benign narrative. “Aside from promoting economic, political and security cooperation and community, it can consolidate state building and democratisation, check heavy-handed behaviour by strong states and global institutions, generate and lock in norms and values, increase transparency, and make states and international institutions more accountable” (Fawcett 2005, p. 21).

Furthermore, the system of international institutions has long had legal “slots” reserved for regionalism. As Hurrell observes, regionalism has its place in the “script” of the postwar UN and Bretton Woods system. Specifically, “[t]here had been regionalist exceptions in the multilateral order and these became increasingly important (especially Article 24 of the GATT [the article dealing with custom unions and free trade areas] and Article 52 of the [UN] Charter [the article encouraging the solving of disputes through regional arrangements])” (Hurrell 2007, p. 240). The end of the Cold War only reinforced the regional trend with a wave of the so-called “open regionalism.” “New strategic traders” such as the EU, Mercosur, and ASEAN emerged and established themselves in the globalized economy. Regional integration became a way of enhancing global economic competitiveness (Telò 2007, p. 10). This has made economic regionalism a structural moment of economic globalization and, consequently regionalist ideas could be seen as corresponding to what is perceived as “natural” and “rational” forms of state behavior and interaction in a globalized environment.

Structural trends toward regionalism have arguably also encompassed the security dimension. Buzan and Wæver (2003) have argued that regions are becoming the key principle of organization in the inter-

national system through “regional security complexes” after the bipolar effect of a world with “no peripheries” (Waltz 1979) has passed. Buzan (2011) develops this line of argument when speaking of “decentered globalism,” as a situation in which not only the post–Cold War global flows of power leave regional “islands” standing asunder, but also there is a form of minimal consensus existing internationally on capitalism as the preferred economic model.

In sum, international relations scholars, arguing from various perspectives, suggest that in the past decades, the international environment presented regionalism with both material and ideational conditions to flourish as discourse and practice. Since the so-called “end of history” it has also been linked closely to the triumphant neoliberal ideology of global economic integration. The development of economic regionalism paralleled the rise to prominence of the neoliberal economic model in several different regions of the world.

The European Union and the West in a broader sense, including the United States, continue to play an important role in this development in several aspects. Firstly, they continue to be the pillars of neoliberalism as the global economic model. Regionalism promotion here goes hand-in-hand with promoting an open economy. Consequently, as Börzel and Risse argue, the US and the EU represent two “normative powers” with two hegemonic projects or two “global scripts” on regionalism that partially overlap (2009a, p. 22). The US script has been based on regional trade cooperation and promotion of a “stable mode of liberal economic governance” (Grugel 2004, p. 608), while the EU’s script is broader in scope and “infringes stronger on the sovereignty of states” (Börzel and Risse 2009a, pp. 22–23).

The EU with its script of a “thick regionalism,” or dense regional institutionalization, continues to be both an involuntary inspiration and a conscious promoter of regional integration worldwide. There is, on the one hand, broad acknowledgement of the fact that direct and comprehensive imitation and emulation of European integration by most regional organizations is unlikely or impossible. Nevertheless, the image of the EU continues to structure many academic and nonacademic debates on regionalism. As Börzel and Risse observe, “the EU is often considered as the ‘gold standard’ of regional integration” (2009a, p. 9). Following Choi and Caporaso, they point out that European integration forms a “conceptual universe” for integration studies (Börzel and

Risse 2009a). A major problem, as Fawcett also admits, in discussions of regionalism is the “Eurocentrism” (Fawcett 2005, p. 26).

In the global discourse of regionalism, the EU has thus become an ultimate reference point. While some regional projects find their inspiration in it and state their intent to emulate, other ones may use it as a negative example.⁵ Still, it can be argued, European integration functions as the key Other, around which much of this discourse is structured. Various interpretations of its experience gain practical and political significance in context of other projects of regional integration worldwide. This leads to a multiplicity of interpretations or “otherings” that are often pivotal to articulatory practices of regionalism. Consequently, for aspiring regionalisms defining one’s stance vis-à-vis the EU as part of the Western global project typically becomes part of defining the Self.

The EU itself also reinforces its central position in the discourse. Driven by a “desire for self-replication” (Haastrup 2013), it promotes or exports regionalism to other parts of the world, with EU–Mercosur (see Santander 2001; Lenz 2008) and EU–African Union (see Haas-trup 2013) relations being some notable examples here.

There is thus a globally established discourse on regional (economic) integration. It can be viewed as an element of the Western neo-liberal hegemony and it is also, to a significant extent, West- or Euro-centric as the European experience regionalism plays a pivotal role in it. This discourse has one more important feature. It works to reorganize or structure the global space into regional spaces that are distinct but embody the same, ubiquitous process of regional economic integration. In doing so it relies on depoliticized, neoliberal categories of economic governance that aspire to have universal significance.

As Larner and Walters (2002) point out, disciplinary assumptions about global regionalism as a unitary phenomenon are in themselves

⁵ For instance, emphasizing the distinction between the EU and ASEAN has been an important part of the academic and broader political discourse. “ASEAN scholars and statesmen,” observes Wong, “themselves have often taken pains to point out that the EU model is too ‘legalistic’ and formal for the ASEAN Way of informality, consensus and consultation, and that the conditions that led to the setting of supranational institutions in western Europe in the 1950s were simply not present in Southeast Asia” (Wong 2012, p. 671).

important, as they institutionalize the view that regional integration everywhere is guided by the same “general logic.”

This logic is the logic of economic growth and development. The economic component retains its central role in the global discourse of regionalism. More often than not, economics assumes the role of its official ideology. Economic integration thus typically forms what Hurrell calls the “public face of regionalism” (Hurrell 2007, p. 45), a depoliticized and technical mask that conceals a bundle of agendas, so that, in fact, “even if its form and dominant rhetoric are economic, regionalism is an extremely complex and dynamic process made up of not one but a series of interacting and often competing logics” (Hurrell 2007, p. 243). By plugging into the discourse on economic gain from regional integration, countries and their leaders can empower themselves and legitimate their actions in tackling a much broader scope of politically more sensitive issues—such as building a security community. Thus, the story of Mercosur, for example, suggests that overcoming a regional rivalry that threatened with a nuclear race, may have been just as important as trade liberalization (Dominguez 2013). The “role model” of regionalism itself, European integration has long clad itself in a depoliticized, functionalized vocabulary of “an economic union, a Zweckverband and a community of expediency” (Olsen 2010).

The economic component in the discourse of regionalism can thus be said to provide regional integration with a neutral and “objective” basis. It depoliticizes and “naturalizes” regions that otherwise might have been thought of as arbitrary political creations. Economic regional institutions function as region builders and form the “platform for institutional expansion” into other issue areas, yet this does not mean—as the history of the European community also demonstrates—that noneconomic normative logics are not responsible for their inception (Powers and Goertz 2011, pp. 2394–2396). It is from this perspective that Larner and Walters also speak “a new understanding of international space,” based on “the vision of market-based market-led ‘open regionalism,’ most commonly associated with APEC but now more generally applied to all regions” (2002, p. 411).

The social construction of economic units thus happens through division of the global space into spatial units by the global discourse of regionalism. It is a discourse, or an array of discourses that share common ideologies, institutional models and practices. The spatial

units that are constructed form a kind of a meso-level of international politics. Regionalisms are projects of entities that exist in between the two levels. Or, as Fawcett puts it, “they are smaller than the international system of states, but larger than any individual state or non-state unit” (Fawcett 2005, p. 25).

But if the global space can be divided into spatial units through the social construction of economic regions, why not make a similar assumption about cultural regionalism? Meso-level supranational entities can also be constructed by discourses of culture. Arguably, the best-known attempt to divide up the global space is Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” doctrine. The doctrine is immensely successful owing to its comprehensive simplicity and the all-encompassing “explanations” of world politics it provides. It has become popular⁶ with politicians, journalists and even some academics, especially in non-Western countries like Russia.

To some scholars, Huntington’s delineation of civilizations seems to be a deliberate exercise in producing difference. Thus, Neumann, reflecting on the consequences of scholarly writing about identity, acknowledges that, perhaps, they cannot be completely foreseen. “And yet,” he points out,

certain analyses—Huntington’s [1993] essay on the clash of civilizations comes to mind—seem to offer “othering” as a piece of practical policy advice for gluing a particular human collective together. Integration and exclusion are two sides of the same coin, so the issue here is not that exclusion takes place but how it takes place. If active othering is proposed as the price of achieving integration, that price seems to be too high to pay. Analyses of collective identity formation should contribute, however timidly, to our living in difference and not to some of us dying from otherness. (Neumann 1999, p. 37)

⁶ In 2012, during his lecture at Kyung Hee University, Peter Katzenstein characteristically complained, that for the past fifteen to twenty years Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations?” inevitably turned up in the top three of his international relations students’ favorite readings. As a lecturer on constructivist scholarship, he was repeatedly upset by the fact (Katzenstein 2012).

Huntington receives his share of criticism for primordializing “civilizations” and for reducing the complex dynamics of international conflict to a form of cultural determinism, which operates with an arbitrarily privileged set of cultural differences, while downplaying others (for an example of a comprehensive criticism, see Rubenstein and Crocker 1994). Furthermore, Huntington did not position his work on the civilizational clash as being strictly scientific, but rather, as he puts it, as a “framework” or “paradigm” that could also be useful to policymakers (Huntington 1996). It is only natural then that policymakers in countries like Russia pick up on his paradigm and try to organize world politics according to the category of civilization.

The type of vocabulary that is used to construct “civilizations” is different from that of economic regionalism as much as culture is different to economics. There are, however, structural similarities that make the two comparable. Firstly, both discourses divide up the global space into meso-levels units that are not only comparable in size but can be both spatially and socially congruent. In his seminal 1993 article Huntington argues that successful economic regionalism and “civilization-consciousness” are mutually reinforcing phenomena. There is, apparently, at least some truth to that. There has been international relations scholarship that examined ways in which cultural backgrounds determine the progress of economic regionalisms, thus weaving culture and economics into one social fabric (see Duina 2006). The case of Russian regionalist discourses certainly presents us with an example of spatial congruence between the projects of Eurasian economic regionalism and the “Russian civilization” as a supranational entity defined in culturalist terms.

Secondly, from the point of view of social construction there is also a certain similarity in the depoliticized way that both culture and economics are used to delineate spaces. Namely, essentialist interpretations of culture define cultural difference as objective and perennial, and civilizations as homogenous entities set up against other homogenous entities. These entities transcend the political borders of nation-states but themselves pretend to be apolitical in their drawing of borders. In the same spirit economic regions are both supranational and depoliticized entities, grounded in the “objective” logic of economic cooperation that should bring individual states together.

Thirdly, the discourses of both economic regions and civilizations involve a Self/Other dichotomy. As I pointed out earlier the discourse

of economic regionalism includes a complex relationship with the perceived European model that can be used both as an example and a counterexample. There is thus a complex array of identifications and self-delineations that occur inside a discourse that is both Eurocentric and Western in origin. Something similar happens to civilizations. The concept of “civilization” delineates the difference between the Western and the non-Western. This is the gist of Huntington’s model. Insofar as non-Western elites rely on Huntington’s concept (and the Russian establishment is certainly very keen on it), they are also plugging into a Western discourse.

Fourthly, and in correlation with the previous point, deliberate and systematic use of culturalist language by elites makes the civilizations discourse a political project. Here I follow up on Fawcett’s definition of regionalism “as a policy or project” (Fawcett 2005, p. 25), as such regionalism can be distinguished from “regionalization,” which can bear the meaning of a spontaneous process. In light of that, I propose to classify culturalist discourses on civilizations as a form of regionalism, specifically as projects of cultural regionalism. I suggest that not only because these discourses divide up the global space into meso-level spatial units—as does the discourse of economic regionalism. Of no lesser importance here is the fact that constructing cultural communities across nation-state borders can be elite-driven political projects that receive government funding and draw on an aggregation of institutions and practices. The current project of a “Russian civilization” alias “Russian world” presents us with one such example. The idea of cultural diplomacy and communities of culture are not, of course, endemic to Russia. There are several postimperial European powers that have a policy of maintaining cultural links with their former colonies. Russia can be effectively compared to them in virtue of its own imperial past. At a glance, it is also obvious that many of its recent ideas of cultural diplomacy are inspired by the analogous European practices.

However, it should be noted that not all postimperial instruments of cultural diplomacy fit into the notion of regionalism—in case we agree on the basic definition of a region as a more or less coherent spatially delineated unit. Cultural links of postimperial powers, such as Portugal, can span across several different continents, thus rendering the concept of regionalism irrelevant. Russia, however, with its past as a “territorially integrated empire” fits the definition. Adjacent territories

of the “near abroad” are the primary object in the gaze of its “civilizational” discourses. It thus seems plausible to apply the concept of (postimperial) cultural regionalism to their analysis.

There are of course important differences to be noted between the cultural and economic regionalisms which may also set a limit to their comparison. The discourse of economic regionalism—understood in the way I outlined it above—is state-centric; sovereignty, borders and national governments are a cornerstone of its script. The discourse of civilizations is more ambiguous on this. Huntington’s (1993) idea of a “kin country syndrome” suggests that nation-states are actors inside the broader framework of a civilization. Likewise, the Russian discourse exhibits notions such as “a country of the Russian world.” On the other hand, the culturalist discourse makes it possible to bypass the national establishment and appeal immediately to the culturally affiliated populations, i.e., the “Russian speakers” in post-Soviet countries rather than their governments. In that sense the culturalist discourse may not only be less state- or elite-centric, and potentially more accommodating to the grassroots, bottom-up type of region building. It also has more sinister implications, as in its extreme forms it may have little respect for internationally recognized borders. At this point it probably stops being a regionalism and shifts to a form of culturally underpinned imperialist irredentism. Here another important difference surfaces also between the Russian discourse and the European postimperial cultural diplomacies that do not normally function as platforms for irredentism.

The differences I listed above are important to bear in mind but they leave room for interpreting the Russian culturalist discourses on the “near abroad” as a project of cultural regionalism. In this capacity it parallels the discourse on Eurasian economic integration. In both discourses Russia is positioned as the center of the project, and its gaze focuses primarily on the “near abroad.” Both discourses also reposition Russia vis-à-vis its Western Other, i.e., whether as the leader of a regional economic bloc or the core of a cultural region or “civilization.” Both discourses are elite driven and government sponsored. In that sense they can therefore be considered establishment projects of a supranational identity. The next chapter brings us closer to examining these projects in more detail. It outlines the approach adopted for studying identitary discourses in Russia and discusses, at some length, the concrete social circumstances to which this approach has tried to be attentive.

CHAPTER 2

The Post-Soviet as Postmodern? Theorizing Identity Discourses in Russia

This chapter outlines my approach to studying identity discourses in Russia and discusses, at some length, the concrete social circumstances to which this approach has tried to be attentive. Here I take a brief look at some of the major theoretical models of discourse and their relative theoretical expediency. I discuss discourse analysis in its two major aspects, the social order of discourse and the discursive resources on which discursive practices draw. In order to grasp that theoretically, I rely primarily on the works of Bourdieu and Laclau and Mouffe, whose elaborations form the theoretical basis of my analysis. With regard to both the social order and the substance of the discourse, or the discursive resources on which political actors in Russia draw, I also provide a discussion of the particular political and cultural context that the study had to take into account. Following up on preexisting research, I suggest that the post-Soviet condition is actually a quasi-postmodern one, often being characterized by ideological eclecticism, a kind of an ad hoc “bricolage” approach toward ideology. I argue, in particular, that in Russia ideological consistency takes a backseat to the Self/Other logic of identity delineation. This eclecticism, on the other hand, is combined with a highly centralized and consolidated political order which results in the ruling class playing a leading role in identity construction. It is with these particular considerations in mind that I opt for “high data” or official and semi-official establishment discourse gathered at various sights of discourse production such as governmental agencies, official press outlets and government-affiliated funds and think tanks.

Introducing the methodology

To examine Russian discourses of cultural and economic regionalism as practices of identity building, I draw on a social constructivist theory and methodology. Social constructivism in the most general sense is a theory that sees structures of meaning as well as other social structures as an evolving artifact of human practice. These structures have an intersubjective rather than an objective ontology, that is, they depend for their existence on collective agreement.

The process of social construction involves actors molding the structures through their practices. This applies to the discursive practice, which is of particular interest to us in the context of this study. The theory of discourse analysis states that meaning is in itself performative; it is never given as a consistent system of concepts, but rather as a result of what Wodak calls “linguistic action” (Wodak 2008).

The process of socially constructing meaning involves both continuity and change. Discursive practices are dependent on the sum of preceding textualities that are available for recycling. Looking at this dependency implies studying how texts are “made possible” by other texts (Neumann 2008). These textualities can be termed discursive resources on which agents rely for their practice. This dependency is twofold in the sense of presenting both a mean and a limit. Plugging into a certain vocabulary means submitting to a set of intrinsic power relations and limitations that are maintained by the existing structures of discourse.

As many theories of discourse suggest, however, factors informing the process of social construction are not limited to intradiscursive realities but also involve extra-linguistic social facts that surround the exercise of discursive practice. Fairclough dubs the latter “socially constituted orders of discourse” (Fairclough 1989, p. 8). Foucault’s notion of the “order of discourse” is more sophisticated. It also distinguishes between “internal procedures for controlling of discourse” and those procedures that, he says, “operate in a sense from the exterior” (Foucault 1981, p. 56). Yet, Foucault’s taxonomy of the procedures of discourse limitation tends to blur the distinction between their exterior and internal groups, ultimately rendering the distinction into language and its social orders somewhat problematic.

There are also approaches preferring a monistic ontology that does not distinguish between discourse and its social order. Thus, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) develop a criticism of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, discarding the idea that the subjects of hegemonic articulatory practices could be discovered as some preexisting social entities. Instead, they argue, the subject is itself constituted in this very field of discursivity and through its articulatory practices. The subject, plainly put, *is* those practices and has no ontological "stuff" outside of them.

This is a postmodernist theoretical position of radical antiessentialism which is philosophically consistent and presents us with a version of what Wendt (2001) labels "a 'performative' model of agency." This optics is close to postcolonial theory with its analysis of "mimicry," "hybridity" and counterhegemonic subversion strategies (Bhabha 1994). The gist of the theory is that it sees the agent as transforming its identity in order to transform the power constellation embedded in the dominant discourse. International relations scholarship also capitalizes on postcolonial approaches to explain the formation of national identities (on Russian and Turkish national selves being "hybridized," see Morozov and Rumelili 2012).

There are empirical cases when the monistic ontology proves to be heuristic for international relations analysis. However, by forbidding us to think outside of the discourse, Laclau and Mouffe's theory inevitably restricts us to analytical vocabularies abstracted from the ontology of linguistic phenomena. In my opinion, this bears the danger of ending up with a trimmed account of agency. The social order—even viewed from the social constructivist point of view—is made up of more than language or discourse, and includes also the material factors of discourse production, its technological and economic environments, i.e., aspects which are not easy to grasp with philosophical categories that Laclau and Mouffe offer to us.

Despite this criticism, my own approach relies on Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse to a considerable extent. It absorbs their philosophical ideas about the open, nonsutured character of the social and of articulatory practices as "contingent interventions" into the existing structures of discourse. One particularly important aspect of discourse according to Laclau and Mouffe is the "polysemy" of signifiers, or, as they put it, the "surplus of signifieds." This surplus implies that meaning is only partially fixed and creates a space, where mean-

ings can be challenged and redefined by the contingent intervention of an articulatory practice.

This theoretical caveat parallels Bourdieu's insights about polysemy as creating a space of contestation. "Religion and politics," he argues "achieve their most successful ideological effects by exploiting the possibilities contained in the polysemy inherent in the social ubiquity of the legitimate language. In a differentiated society, what are called 'common' nouns—work, family, mother, love, etc.—assume in reality different and even antagonistic meanings, because the members of the same 'linguistic community' use more or less the same language and not several different languages" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 40).

Political struggles over the meaning of common words as seen by Bourdieu are close to Laclau and Mouffe's notion of "nodal points" or key concepts whose definition determines the distribution of power in a society. However, the ultimate virtue of Bourdieu's theoretical model, to my mind, is that it combines intra- and extralinguistic factors of discourse to explain the process of social construction of reality. It pays due attention to the "polysemy" inherent in structures of meaning, but also to the importance of the (nonlinguistic) social order, in particular to what Bourdieu calls the "mystery of ministry" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 249) or the role of the social position of the speaker, and of the associated "symbolic capital," in the process of "symbolic production." In view of concrete constellations of power in a society, its discourses can be seen as hierarchized, and the value of certain discursive practice can be prioritized over others in terms of empirical analysis. At the same time, discourse should not be viewed as simply fixed according to the constellation of positions of power and authority. Discursive practice is a product of multiple causality, a point of intersection for intra- and extradiscursive causal logics, whose relative mutual autonomy is a necessary analytical assumption.

This particular book is a study of establishment discourse. It therefore involves dealing with hierarchies. These hierarchies include multiple social roles of "officials" and "experts" that are endowed with a variety of symbolic capitals. Because it embeds discursive practice, social order allows the assignment of specific status to its particular, empirical instances. I therefore combine Laclau and Mouffe's ideas with Bourdieu's approach to the study of symbolic production as being socially conditioned. Based on that I build a model of discourse that

analyzes how the Russian establishment reconstructs Russia's identity as a supranational entity or region through the discourses of cultural and economic regionalisms.

The post-Soviet as postmodern? Identity building and ideological eclecticism

My approach thus revolves around two basic assumptions. Firstly, I argue, the discourse is organized hierarchically. This is a notion that many social constructivists would probably agree with even in general. On the other hand, however, I select this approach also being conscious of the particular way in which power is traditionally organized and exercised in Russia. Namely, one of the main features of the Russian state is a particularly high concentration of material and symbolic resources in the hands of the ruling class. This is an additional reason to focus on establishment discourses and ways in which they shape notions of the collective Self.

With regard to this set of discursive practices, the social position of the so-called "elite" is clearly defined as belonging to institutions that partake in the processes of governance and decision-making. These are social positions that create possibilities of producing "authoritative" discourse because they imply institutionally backed "authority." Their "symbolic power" rests on public assumption of their capacity to make political commitments, invest resources, employ coercion and engage in other forms of activities that are likely to have significant influence on the behavior of the governed. The words of the powerful, thus, contain degrees of social performativity even when they are rendered in the form of descriptions of reality. These descriptions also often reveal intentions and in that case they are formulated as political *projects*. Texts that speak of such projects tend to become "canonical" or "monuments" (Neumann 2008) and receive intensive "commentary" (Foucault 1981) from other interlocutors. They are hegemonic in the sense of installing the "nodal points" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) or providing "master articulations" around which further debate comes to be structured, and setting the standards of discursive orthodoxy.

Therefore, methodologically speaking, this is how I treat identity constructs such as the "Eurasian Union" as political projects of

the elite. These are introduced in a top-down way, and rely on the symbolic power exercised by officials and politicians. It is their constitutive speech acts which imposes broad identitary frames as “nodal points” that condition further debate. Bourdieu’s (1991) idea was that specific relations of symbolic power in symbolic production mirror the overall constellation of power in societies. The principle of top-down, elite initiation of identitary discourses, doubtless, has much to do with the hierarchized and centralized institutionalization of power—both as a long-term, historical invariable of Russian state and society (see Gaidar 2003; Skocpol 1979)—as well as the specific type of hierarchical hyper-presidential political model (and the associated political culture) that developed in post-Soviet Russia under Yeltsin and Putin and came to be known in academic and political parlance as the “vertical of power” (see, for instance, Sakwa 2011; Colton and Holmes 2006).¹

The second assumption that the present analysis rests on has to do with vocabularies, or discursive resources, that are employed in social construction of identities. Understood more broadly, they are the concepts, doctrines, ideologies and symbols on which those engaged in “symbolic production” of identity come to rely. They are a factor in their own right, as they are the “signifieds” that exhibit “polysemies,” thus providing discursive practice with room for its “contingent interventions.” Understanding them involves *inter alia* the tracing of their cultural, ideological and institutional references—both explicit and implicit—to earlier textualities. It is thus also an “archeological” task that deals with those “spirits of the past” that, as Marx argued, are always conjured in new political enterprises.

With regard to this second aspect of discursive construction post-Soviet Russia exhibits a particularly interesting feature. As I point out in this chapter, following the research that has already been carried out, it can be seen as a quasi-postmodern condition of ideological eclecticism or syncretism. Namely, insofar as discursive practice is concerned, high levels of “verticalizing” power in this particular political model did not entail ideological homogeneity of rhetoric or consistent commitment

¹ These notions of the particularity of Russian political model led part of the scholars to inherit the tradition of a narrow analytical focus on the top of the executive, continuing from the Kremlinology of Cold War-era Sovietologists to a kind of post-Soviet “Putinology” (Umland 2007, p. 13).

of political elites to one ideological vocabulary. As Silitski, for example, argued, the peculiarly atypical character of Russian autocracy was that it did not “rely on an elaborate and guiding ideology” but was rather “heavily grounded in distinctive mentalities, meaning a specific political culture that justifies strong centralized authority through the use of extensive references to history, faith and identity” (Silitski 2009, pp. 42–43).

Consequently, the ruling class has tended to avail itself of a variety of discursive resources drawn from different, often contradicting doctrines. The political regime built under Putin came to be characterized by some observers as “postideological” (Krastev 2011). It was not prone to bind itself to ideological alternatives, inheriting, as some argued, from the Soviet secret service its habits of manipulating public life (see Wilson 2005), and an organizational culture of control (see Taylor 2011) that bred disbelief in the autonomy of political and economic processes. The ensuing nihilism toward any ideology as a mere “façade” fostered an inclination to “manage” and manipulate the ideological field by co-opting various ideological currents without suspending ideological pluralism altogether. Incidentally, in recent years this approach was also being extended to the Kremlin’s cooperation with friendly political forces in the West. Analysts have described this approach as “trans-ideological,” pointing out the Kremlin’s ad hoc selection of political allies inside the EU (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2016).

“Management” of the ideological field thus opened additional possibilities for the ruling class to stand “above” and beyond fixed ideological preferences. Apparently, the effect of a “postmodern dictatorship” (Pomerantsev 2013), constructed through ideological co-optation, is twofold. On the one hand, the political process is reduced to a system of carefully managed and largely imitative “virtual politics” (Wilson 2005). But on the other hand, as some argued, emasculating political competition was, paradoxically, able to foster a crystallization of ideological pluralism inside the ruling class itself as, at a certain point, the United Russia, Putin’s party of power factionalized itself, structured itself into ideologically distinct “wings” and “clubs” (Laruelle 2009).

Postmodernization notwithstanding, students of Russia have also acknowledged that consolidation of state power under Putin created opportunities for a more efficient centralized management of the ideological field as regards foreign affairs. Tsygankov, for instance, credits Putin with having “transformed the political spectrum,” with “main-

stream discourse” being dominated by neither “Westernizers” nor “imperialists,” and Putin situating himself in the “broad middle” of this spectrum, “integrating creative impulses from supporters of liberal integration with the West with the urgings of those who defend the idea of Russia as a counterbalance to the West’s ‘unipolar’ ambitions” (Tsygankov 2010, p. 1090). Or, as Makarychev argues, “Putin’s foreign policy philosophy is to a large extent grounded in an apolitical—and thus managerial, technocratic—type of thinking” (Makarychev 2013a, p. 250). Consequently, the borderlines between foreign policy alternatives in the ruling class discourse have been “becoming more fuzzy” and adherence to alternatives more opportunistic:

Russia chooses to be simultaneously with, within and against the West, which allows the political elite to take advantage pragmatically of the existing opportunities for personal needs (accounts in Western banks, property acquisition, shopping, tourism, education, etc.), while publicly lambasting the West as either a geopolitical rival or as a civilization in decline. The semantic gap between Putin’s address to the German Bundestag and his Munich speech only a few years later demonstrates the fluidity and changeability of speaking positions within the Kremlin. Each identification of an individual with a certain discourse has to be put in a specific political or historical context and not universalized (*ibid.*, pp. 241–242).

This pragmatic or “postmodern” approach of absorbing multiple ideologies and relying on them situationally characterizes also the elite foreign policy discourses. As Lo argued, a form of ideological eclecticism characterized Russian foreign doctrines already under Yeltsin, when the “relative pluralism of post-Soviet society” expressed itself in several ideologies inhabiting the field of official foreign policy discourse. Among them were the liberal agenda of integrating with the West and the “economization of foreign policy,” the “imperial syndrome” based on “the centrality of CIS affairs,” the “great power ideology” as well as “ideas of foreign policy ‘retrenchment’” that “advocated concentration on a narrow set of priorities” (Lo 2002, p. 7).

This phenomenon of ideological pluralism or “postmodernism” also motivates the conceptual and empirical approaches of this study.

On the empirical side it takes a broad sample of discourses that touch upon a variety of agendas, all of which are involved in identity production. This corresponds to the conceptual side that organizes discourses around two frames or two broad notions, those of a cultural and an economic region, respectively.

As I stated previously, I follow up on the arguments of international relations scholars who view Russian responses to “unipolarity” as a manifestation of antihegemonic concern. Thus, Lo (2002) argues that doctrinal alternatives to “unipolarity” such as “multilateralism” or “multipolarity” were originally stimulated by a perceived Western hegemony in the post-Cold War international environment. These concepts or doctrines are, therefore, deeply intertwined with the enduring Self/Other “relationship” with Europe, or the West, into which Russian identity has been long “caught” (Neumann 1996).

Consequently, one should not be confused by the heterogeneous, polyphonic assemblage of discourses enmeshed in the discourses of Russia as an economic or a cultural region. In terms of its genealogy, the vocabularies of economic regionalism tailored to address the agenda of mutual welfare maximization, indeed, stand far apart from the discourses on “civilizations” loaded with romantic nationalist notions of shared culture, religion, values as well as with pseudo-scientific expressions with a vague meaning, such as “our civilizational code [nash civilizatsionnyi kod].” (In the Russian-speaking discourse these obscure expressions are rather abundant ideologemes. They are instances of what can be perhaps dubbed “civilizational essentialism”—or “civilizational metaphysics.”)

However, the different pedigrees of these strands of discourse do not mean they cannot be studied as part of the same sets of discursive practices. The “salad” of various discursive resources often conceals rather similar strategies of formulating the Self/Other relationship. Historically, as Neumann (1996) shows, “Europe” has been “othered” by Russians in a number of different ways, which included diverse ideologies and agendas. “Spirituality promotion” of the conservative Slavophile philosophers could be replaced by promotion of social justice. Visions of the national Self could switch drastically from religious to Communist editions of international messianism. (On this, see, in particular, Berdyaev’s (1937) classical depiction of the peculiar way in which Marxism was recycled by Russian culture to produce a form of a quasi-religious secular messianism.) What remained more stable is the

fact of the identitary “relationship,” which was itself organized around the Self/Other binary structure.

Apart from broader historical reasons, the “Greek salad” composition of discursive resources employed for identity construction also has to do with the more specific post-Communist condition of Russian society. Following the disintegration of a monolithic, inherently consistent official ideology of Marxism-Leninism, the post-Soviet condition was characterized not merely by ideological pluralism understood in conventional liberal terms, but also by what one could call a “postmodernization” and relativization of ideologies. This is a form of ideological syncretism that often features earlier unthought-of political hybrids. In terms of political ideologies the most iconic proof of this eclecticism is probably the evolution of Russia’s Communist Party itself—from its official identity as the agent of Marxist internationalism into a “state patriotic” party whose leadership’s thinking in the 1990s was, according to Sakwa (1998, p. 140), “characterized by such terms as *sobornost’* (conciliarism or collegiality, but in practice suggesting the organic unity of the nation), *derzhavnost’* (great power status), *narodnost’* (community, in effect populism), quite apart from commitment to the state (*gosudarstvennost’*).” “The state” was no longer defined by the Communists “as the instrument of class rule but as the agent of national development—in the right hands” (*ibid.*). Consequently, already in the first post-Soviet decade the party’s unchallenged leader Gennadiy Zyuganov was espousing a “heady mix of statism, Slavophilism and populism” (*ibid.*). Zyuganov, Sakwa argued, was “a Eurasianist of a particularly virulent anti-Western sort, deriving his ideas from Lev Gumilev and stressing the roles of the *ethnos*, or nation, as the moving force in history. From this comes the idea of Eurasia as a geopolitical entity dominated by the Russian ‘superethnos’, the fusion of Eastern Slavs and Tatars, or Mongols” (*ibid.*).

This is thus an example of a hybridization of leftist ideology with right-wing geopolitics and religious conservatism (consider that “*sobornost’*” that Sakwa brings up is a conceptual anchor of Russian religious philosophy, coined, apparently, by the Slavophile Khomiakov). It presents an exotic form of post-Soviet ideological eclecticism—rivaled in its grotesqueness perhaps only by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, which, despite its official name, always relied actively on authoritarian, chauvinistic and xenophobic ideas. (For a

comprehensive examination of the LDPR phenomenon and the origins of Russia's post-Soviet "new right," see Umland 1997.)

The difficulty in disentangling different ideological platforms and discourses is meant to demonstrate just how easily ideas—often imported by the Russian society from the West in what Neumann (1996) calls "discursive packages"—become recombined in ways not anticipated by an observer who may have only the Western conceptual matrix at his disposal. Naturally, hybridization practices do not start with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Earlier, I referred to the Soviet ideology as monolithic and espousing Marxist internationalism. Yet, as Hopf, for example, argues in his study, by the 1950s the USSR clearly developed a "great power" identity (Hopf 2002, p. 83) alongside its leftist internationalism. And the necessity to balance between statism and internationalism goes back all the way to the early Soviet period with its "two-track" foreign policy, caught in a contradiction between the mission to ignite a global revolution destroying the existing world order and the need to secure recognition for the USSR as a legitimate member of this very order (Ringmar 2002).

The post-Soviet ideological eclecticism and syncretism—picturesque as they may be—are, thus, rooted in complex, long-term processes of adapting various imported "discursive packages" for domestic needs. Examining the history of these processes is not the aim of this work—but being aware of them is necessary to understand the particular ways in which political discourse operates in Russia. Ideas and agendas that discursive practice evokes need to be placed in the specific context of the respective practices. And—as regards ideological syncretism—if the collapse of the centralized control of the Communist Party over ideological production in Russia clearly did not start the hybridization per se, it certainly increased opportunities for independent ideological entrepreneurship, thus, arguably bringing relativization to its further stage.

As I previously pointed out, students of Russian politics have recognized this spirit of postmodernism or ideational relativism that informs it. It has been described as "post-ideological" (Krastev 2011), or a "postmodern dictatorship" (Pomerantsev 2013). Also illustrative of this postmodern environment is a reflection coming from Alexander Dugin. Dugin is currently the foremost Russian champion of "neo-Eurasianism" whose intellectual influence, it is argued, grew notably during the Putin

years. (For an analysis of the role Dugin and his ideology have played, see Umland 2007; Laruelle 2008). In a 2013 op-ed titled “Eurasian Integration in the Postmodern Optics,” Dugin² advocates that Eurasian integration should be carried out with the “postmodern method.” This method corresponds to the new paradigm of politics, where the intellectual, undertaking ideological production, is the “main subject of political reality” (ibid.). The postmodern intellectual, argues Dugin, is “qualitatively different from his modern predecessors, the scientist and the member of the intelligentsia.” While the member of the intelligentsia is interested in the moral, ontological or aesthetic problems, looking for the meaning of life and society, the “postmodern intellectual” is “completely free from this agenda: he does not look for meaning, he operates with meaning. He is free from ethic or aesthetic connotations. *He is like a Dž*, bringing together different models of meaning, different theories and concepts into a general intellectual rhythm. He is interested in different systems of meaning, but he is coldly detached from every one of them” (emphasis added). Contrary to the member of the intelligentsia, the postmodern intellectual is “indifferent to the spirit of the intellectual system” while “understanding in general terms the varying and sometimes contradictory intellectual models.” He is “an ad hoc appearing, rationalizing, DJ-ing creature that manipulates with meaning” (ibid.).

Clearly, there are different ways to look at the phenomenon of post-Soviet ideological eclecticism. One can see it as a natural outcome of the eventual collapse of a centralized ideological apparatus that had been long forcing citizens into a permanent state of totalitarian doublethink—ultimately discrediting and relativizing all ideology as such. As Wilson suggests, “the cynicism of political behavior in most of the post-Soviet states can only be understood in terms of its deep roots in the late Soviet era” (2005, p. 18). The post-Soviet industry of “virtual politics” (fabrication of political movements and ideologies by the so-called “political technologists”) in that case inherits—bone and flesh—from the so-called “active measures,” i.e., KGB practices of manipulating public opinion at home and abroad (Wilson 2005). Alternatively, one could see the eclecticism as a result of postmodern ideological practice, made possible by

² Evraziyskaya integratsiya v optike postmoderna [Eurasian integration in the postmodern optics]. EURASIA: A portal for information and analysis, August 22, 2013. <http://evrazia.org/article/2354>. Accessed December 1, 2014.

a new, postindustrial infrastructure of communication technologies—as Dugin’s op-ed that I am citing also suggests. Or, indeed, one can see it as an intersection of both. My own empirical concern here has been a correct interpretation of discourses assembled around the Eurasian-civilizationist concepts of Russian identity. As I suggested, the two have been functioning as broad identitary “frames” which have been acting as “salad bowls” for a variety of discursive resources often having their pedigree in different issue areas, as well as in different political platforms. The empirical findings of the study demonstrate that clearly. Thus, the overall discourse on Eurasian integration combines a neoliberal approach to international economic relations—the “four freedoms” of the Eurasian common market (known as the “single economic space”) being a core idea—with political discussion on a culture of “conservative” Eurasian values—as well as with ideas on a postneoliberal, postcrisis model of regional governance. Furthermore, all that happens within the same discursive space is often articulated by the same agents. Hence, I do not believe this should lead us into understanding these discursive practices as isolated from each other. On the contrary, I suggest, they should be analyzed together, functioning as many coexisting instances of “othering” undertaken within the broad identitary frame that ultimately binds them together. This identitary frame hinges on the structure of a Self/Other relationship which is more important than the immediate agenda or ideological platform that a discursive practice evokes.

In this context I would also point out to one more historical example. The violent 1993 political crisis in Russia which saw a rallying of both radical nationalists and Communists in the Supreme Soviet against President Yeltsin, and his reform agenda, demonstrated clearly: different political discourses—and their practitioners—can be organized not only on the basis of what they are, but also on the basis of what they are *not*. For instance, as Parland observes, the fragmented field of Russian nationalism in the 1990s clearly shared one common denominator—their hostile attitude toward the West (2005, p. 86). Furthermore, anti-Westernism was a point of convergence for what one would assume to be natural ideological enemies. Thus, argues Parland, the anti-communist campaign at the beginning of the 1990s had never totally dominated the ideological climate. From the outset, part of the nationalist-minded Russians perceived the West and its “fifth column in Russia,” the ruling liberals, as constituting a greater

danger to Russia than the communists. The dissolution of the Soviet empire and the threatening perspective of a further disintegration of their country gave many anti-communist nationalists the impression that Russia had won the fight against communism only at the price of losing itself (*ibid.*, p. 57).

The negative constitutive other of the left–right alliance was, therefore, the liberal (and by implication “Western”) ideology of market reforms, imported into the post-Soviet Russia by Yeltsinite reformers. The meaning of particular political ideologies was, thus, at this point constituted by their opposition to liberal Westernization—and its high social costs—and not by the doctrinal differences between Communism and Russian nationalism.

Difference in political ideologies, thus, take a back seat to the more fundamental difference in the identitary stance (pro- or anti-Western). Therefore, they can be reconciled in identitary frames that are built around a particular Self/Other structure. The spatial concept of “Eurasia,” in turn provides one such possible frame. This could be clearly seen, for instance, in Katzenstein’s comment (including quoting Charles Clover) on the growing role of the concept in Russian political discourse:

Once believing that Russia’s return to greatness was preordained by the laws of history, Russian nationalists, including such politicians as Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Gennady Ziuganov now put their hope in geography—in space rather than in time. At the end of the Marxist or nationalist tunnel, it seems, there is always the promise of reassertion of Russian preeminence. “Eurasianism,” writes Charles Clover, “has succeeded in reconciling the often contradictory philosophies of communism, religious orthodoxy, and nationalist fundamentalism. Eurasianism [...] has become an umbrella philosophy, absorbing all that is radical in the bubbling cauldron of post-Soviet political thought.” (Katzenstein 2005, p. 9)

Contextualizing helps. The external constitutive other is what brings the many discursive practices together, making them reproduce similar patterns of the Self/Other relationship, while relying on seemingly unrelated discursive resources. This study also sheds some light on ways in which both ideological stances and agendas are melted together and hybridized. And it is not only that there are obviously isomorphic

narratives to be found on different issue areas. For example, Vladimir Putin's vision of a "community of economies" stretching from "Lisbon to Vladivostok" presented in his seminal article on Eurasian integration³ clearly echoes previous visions of an "indivisible security" sphere extending "from Vancouver to Vladivostok" (Russia's Foreign Policy Concept 2008). Both attest to the same geopolitical imaginary of a "huge Eurasian chessboard extending from Lisbon to Vladivostok" (Brzezinski 1997, p. 35). What is more important, is that different issue areas seem to get hybridized actively. Thus, as the empirical findings suggest, the understanding of what "security" means has clearly evolved in the Russian political and intellectual establishment. Cultural globalization, as well as Western "soft power," seem to be somewhat of an obsession here, and are often narrativized as threats to national security and sovereignty. For example, in *New Technologies to Combat Russian Statehood* (2013), Yakunin et al. speak of foreign "cognitive weapons" and "cultural de-sovereignization" as threats to Russia. Similarly, Podberiozkin (2013) discusses "soft power" and the export of Western values in the same context with "network-centric warfare" against Russia and other "Eurasian" states.

Culture, economics and security, thus, often come to operate as part of the same discourse, which is bound together by a concern about an external Other. This external Other is juxtaposed with regionalizing definitions of the Self, which are put forth as part of a Self/Other nexus. Therefore, the two frames, cultural and economic regionalism, though having very different ideological pedigrees, operate in a structurally similar way. And, consequently, as empirical analysis demonstrates, in foreign policy discourses the two are often brought together and treated as closely related and mutually sustaining agendas.

This rather long methodological note on the hybridization of ideologies as well as agendas in Russian foreign policy discourses means to justify the conceptual and empirical approach of this study. With regard to empirics we thus discover a variety of discourses that pertain to a broad set of agendas, including such seemingly distinct areas as culture and economics. On the conceptual side, however, the study brings

³ Putin, Vladimir. 2011. "Novyj integracionnyj proekt dlja Evrazii – budushhee, kotoroe rozhdaetsja segodnja." *Izvestia*, October 3. <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>. Accessed September 30, 2014.

together the two different forms of regionalism and treats them as phenomena that are both comparable and, to a large extent, isomorphic from the point of view of the intrinsic “grammar” of their narratives.

Empirical basis

In terms of its empirics the study relies on two sets of discursive practices. I call them “official discourse” and “expert discourse.” For reasons I explained earlier, preference is given to what is identified as “high” as opposed to “low data,” namely “official or semi-official discourse circulating among elites and from elites to various publics” (Weldes, cited in Yanow et al. 2006).

As I pointed out in the previous section, hierarchization of politics in Russia does not entail ideological homogeneity in elite discursive practice. This leads the researcher away from models of discourse that rest on the notion of a centralized authority imposing a coherent ideological worldview and toward approaches that see ideological discourses in Russia rather as Foucauldian “spaces of dispersion” where dominant ideological themes, such as “conservatism,” are not systematized doctrines but “nodal points” or “privileged modalities of discourse” that underpin the regime’s ideological hegemony (Prozorov 2005).

From this point of view, also the interpretation of expert and officials’ discourse as two strands of the same discourse which yields the “high data” for analysis, should become relatively clear. The “official” and “semi-official” are not so easily separated. Existing studies demonstrate that the political economy of ideological “systems of dispersion” involved outsourcing part of the symbolic production to intellectual bodies not formally associated with state institutions. Thus, Laruelle in her study demonstrates how the creation of new nationalist ideologies of the Russian establishment was outsourced to a number of think tanks that were closely linked to the establishment, at the same time not formally being part of the state apparatus (Laruelle 2009). To some extent it also seems to have been a two-way street. As Umland (2007) argues in his study of Russia’s “uncivil society,” radical nationalist currents such as Dugin’s “neo-Eurasianism” managed to ideologically infiltrate a considerable share of the Russian establishment.

It therefore makes a lot of sense to follow the research strategies that do not limit the “high data” to discourse of officials whose symbolic authority as political elites is institutionally delineated, implying that discursive elements are passed on to the broader discursive space where they become elaborated and reinterpreted, thus becoming “semi-official” discourse.⁴ Following the social constructivist paradigm, political expertise and political experts here are seen not as detached, neutral observers but as actors that are also engaged in constructing the political entities they strive to analyze.

The study avails itself of a sample of discourses collected from both officials and experts that are co-opted into the production of the official discourse. The sample was gathered from several sights of discourse production. The first important source of data was the official bodies of the Russian Federation, including the office of the president and the institution of presidential administration that typically plays an influential role in post-Soviet politics. With respect to that, the research systematically processed a body of texts that have included presidential public speeches, official addresses and journal and newspaper articles for the reference period. Other sources include discourse of political parties that are represented in parliament as part of the system of the so-called Russian “managed democracy.”⁵ The study also covered relevant government ministries, agencies and government-sponsored funds and GONGOs. Among other, these included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and agencies like Rossotrudnichestvo (alias the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots

⁴ This does not mean that representations that are elaborated by think tanks and other intellectual communities simply cut and paste official elite discourse or preserves the same degree of homogeneity and conformity. This is not so in practice, and this would also contradict the theoretical tenets of the discourse analytical approach. No discourse can ever be homogenous, nor entirely stable, instead representations form a changing continuum or flux. Different representations or discursive positions, however, have a varying degree of continuity and “some are more difficult to alter than others” (Neumann 2008, p.73).

⁵ The conventional understanding of “managed democracy” in Russia is that it is a “hybrid regime” that co-opts part of the political opposition into institutions such as the parliament in order to simulate political pluralism while emasculating actual political competition and eliminating democratic uncertainty.

Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation) and the Aleksander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, as well as the Russian World Foundation. The latter are often referred to as tools of the Kremlin's "soft power" strategy.

The sample of semi-official discourse has included a number of think tanks and epistemic communities. The selection was based on Laruelle's 2009 study documenting the rise of new establishment-affiliated nationalist think tanks in Russia, but the original catalog was broadened and updated. As an additional source of discourse three major media outlets were also covered. They were picked on the basis of Arutunyan's (2009) comprehensive study of the Russian media market as well as on available TNS Gallup National Readership Surveys (NRS). Among them *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is the official mouthpiece of the Russian government. *Izvestia* is a private national newspaper that at some point came under control of Kremlin-associated businessmen and has become increasingly conservative leaning, while also functioning as a platform for some of Putin's keynote political statements. Finally, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is a popular national daily tabloid that has apparently had "a good reputation with the Kremlin" (Arutunyan 2009, p. 53), one that has seen it adopt a pro-government stance on more than one issue.

The reference period of the sample is from January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2013. Preference was given to 2007 as the starting year due to several important events. Firstly, 2007 is the year of Vladimir Putin's keynote speech at the Munich Security Conference. Secondly, 2007 is the year of the establishment of the Russian World Foundation, which marks a new trend toward the institutionalization of "civilizational" concepts in Russia. Thirdly, the intention to create a customs union within the Eurasian Economic Community was announced at the same time, thus paving way to the "Eurasian Union" narrative.

I argue that in recent years, discursive practices of the Russian establishment have worked to construct a particular version of Russian identity through projects of cultural and economic regionalism. This social construction has often been deliberate. Its key ideas resonate with the deeply ingrained feeling shared by many in the Russian establishment, namely, that Russia is not merely a nation-state, but a supranational entity that is entitled to a special and equal status in its relations with the Western Other. In subsequent chapters I rely on the sample to demonstrate just how this discursive production of identity took place.

CHAPTER 3

The Language of Civilizations in Post-Soviet Russia

This chapter maps the intellectual environment in post-Soviet Russia and the development of civilizational discourses. I argue that this environment, created by the broader academic and intellectual establishment, in effect nourished the official discourse on Russian civilization. In its examination of identity construction this book concentrates primarily on official discourse. Prominent speakers, however, often have their less prominent precursors. Iver Neumann in his reflections on the study of discourse identifies something that he calls the “John the Baptist problem.” Namely, for many documented authorships of ideas, there is often a forerunning author to be found in earlier discourses, who expressed a somehow similar idea. Though bearing close semblance in content, the precursor idea may never equal the second idea in its prominence.

Concepts and ideas that gained momentum in the official Russian discourse thus also had their intellectual precursors. Insofar as the ideas of “Russian civilization” or the “Russian world” are concerned, they draw on a long historical tradition that goes back to the nineteenth century. The existing research that I highlight in this chapter demonstrates that the resurgence of civilizational ideas was part of the post-Soviet transition from the Communist regime to post-Soviet Russia. Furthermore, domestic ideas evolved in a curious symbiosis with Western-imported doctrines of a civilizational clash, associated with the name of Samuel Huntington. The cultural civilizationalist strand of the official

discourse in Russia thus can be understood as having grown out of the broader environment where it had been reproduced for years. As the chapter shows, even some of its key concepts were previously elaborated in intellectual milieus that were formally detached from the Russian state but apparently served as sources of inspiration for the official identity-building practices.

The language of civilizations in post-Soviet Russia

Notions of Russia as a civilization are older than the ideological exercises of the present-day Russian establishment. Prior to the Soviet period civilizational thinking had been a long and well-established intellectual tradition. As Igor Zvelev (2009) justly points out, its roots extend back to the Slavophile attempts to think of Russian history and culture in terms alternative to the “West,” and more immediately to Nikolay Danilevsky’s theory of the plurality of “cultural-historical types” (Danilevsky 2011). Danilevsky’s pan-Slavist vision, as Zvelev (2009) suggests, “revealed a supranational, civilizational tendency in the development of Russian identity.”

While the Communist regime officially banned Slavophiles as reactionary conservatives, the post-Soviet period, on the contrary, actively reembraced the interrupted civilizationist tradition of political thinking as the new alternative to the obsolete Marxism-Leninism. The truth, however, was also that, as Shnirelman (2009) points out, this civilizational alternative was being revived in a specific social environment. This post-Soviet environment had inherited much in terms of its intellectual habits and practices from the previous period of history:

Today a civilizational approach not only is used extensively by many Russian scholars but also has been introduced into the school curriculum. The collapse of the communist ideology in the USSR in the late 1980s made many historians and political scientists give up the former Marxist socioeconomic approach to history and replace it with the cultural civilizational approach as a new, promising paradigm. [...] An irony is that, on the one hand, radical democrats and anti-communists promoted the civilizational approach and all the efforts to cleanse Soviet Marxist ide-

ology from the intellectual milieu. But on the other hand, former instructors both in Communist Party history and in Marxist philosophy, who aspired to get rid of their own questionable past in a radical fashion, also adopted the approach. (Shnirelman 2009, pp. 127–128)

Thus, in many cases ideological mimicry of the old educational cadres allowed them, more or less, to preserve the old standards of intellectual activity and the familiar practices of reproducing institutionalized dogma. As Shnirelman observes, first introduced in the mid-1990s the civilizational approach quickly gained popularity in the educational establishment. By 2000 it was included in a draft of the official state concept of historical education. Subsequently, it became part of the national standard of historical education adopted in 2004 (*ibid.*, p. 131).

The vocabulary of civilizationalism, as Shnirelman argues, had its benefits. It provided Russia “with a special status flattering for those who feel nostalgia for its former status as a world power.” Indeed, Russia is represented not as a common state but as a civilization, a “Eurasian continent,” and is compared to Europe or “Atlantic civilization” rather than to such states as the United Kingdom, France or Germany (*ibid.*, p. 128). This is only true, and it dovetails well with the idea of a “supranational” tendency in Russian identity that Zvelev (2009) brings up, as well as with the category of “state plus” approaches (Makarychev and Morozov 2011) that were discussed in previous chapters. Another way to look at it, however, is to see the institutionalization of the civilizational approach as having given practices of ethnocultural difference production a scientific alibi. On the one hand, as Shnirelman suggests, the “civilizational approach,” as far as Russia is concerned, looks suspiciously similar to a new edition of Russian imperialist nationalism, which grew out of the post-Soviet identity crisis. According to him:

[T]he civilizational approach essentializes Russia as a uniform and highly persistent, if not eternal, cultural region that is naturally fated to serve as the foundation for an integrated political body. To be sure, this project recognizes a variety of cultures that constitute the basis of Eurasia. Yet by contrast to the original Eurasianism, it fails to discuss cultural pluralism in contemporary Russia, let alone its future. (Shnirelman 2009, pp. 134–135)

So, the civilizational approach, even if not identical with what one may call conventional Russian ethnic nationalism, still uploads a number of important cultural elements such as language, religion and a set of ethnic values. Verkhovsky and Pain (2010, p. 172) make a similar argument in their study of the so-called “civilizational nationalism” in Russia by observing that “notwithstanding the uncertainty of very concept of civilization, it is typically used in Russian politics with the same purposes that usually belong to ethnic nationalism.”

Cultural elements are then used as a means of difference production, just as in other, more conventional nationalisms. On the other hand, the practices of constructing a “civilizational” identity are given an additional scientific alibi. Insofar as it is institutionalized as a historical or sociological discipline, the civilizational approach, even in its most bluntly doctrinal forms, gains an air of depoliticized scientificity. This is a symbolic advantage that conventional champions of nationalism, such as political actors and social movements, never have.

This is also telling from the point of view of continuity between Marxist-Leninist and civilizational ideological practice. In the USSR “scientific communism” was institutionalized as a discipline, and Marxist philosophy and ideology were officially considered to have scientific status. Civilizationism grew in the same dogmatic and undemanding intellectual culture.

Notably, in the post-Soviet period the so-called “civilizational approach” was not only an “alternative” to the vanquished Marxism-Leninism, as Shnirelman (2009) argued, but also an ideology to fall back on for those intellectuals who eventually came to be disappointed with liberal Westernization. Such was, for example, the case of a prominent philosopher of civilizationism, Aleksandr Panarin, who occupied a “semidissident position” in Soviet times (Laruelle 2008, p. 87) and during perestroika was “an ardent proponent of democracy, liberalism, universalism, and, even, the Reformation,” began to turn to Eurasianism by mid-1990s (Umland 2007, pp. 123–124). Panarin’s biography, observes Laruelle, “is highly revelatory of the evolution of large parts of Russian academia” (Laruelle 2008, p. 87). He represented the epitome of an intellectual trajectory that proceeded from Westernizer liberalism to anti-Western “neo-Eurasianism” conceived in geopolitical and civilizational terms:

After the Soviet Union's unexpected demise in 1991, some intellectuals and politicians set out to seek a new substitute for ideology that would allow them to come to terms with the rapid changes. Over the course of the 1990s, the difficult transition to market economy and disillusionment with Russia's new democracy gradually prompted others to join the ranks of the original nostalgists for Soviet grandeur. The neo-Eurasianists agreed with this group that the collapse of a specific regime, that of "real socialism," did not entail the collapse of the country; for them the change of ideology did not justify the territorial contraction of the Soviet Union, which they more or less consciously equated with Russia. Thus the disappearance of the USSR was attributed to treason by its elites and by the West and was perceived as a negation of Russia's imperial nature. (Laruelle 2008, p. 83)

Like geopolitics, civilizationism is a "bird's eye view" and a *longue durée* approach. This makes the two natural allies, prone to intermingling, as the varieties of Russian "neo-Eurasianism" very well demonstrate. In civilizationism, culture, to a greater extent than space, serves as the ontological point of departure. Here, Huntington's definition of civilization "as a cultural entity" (1993, p. 23) springs to mind with "differences between civilizations" postulated as "not only real," but "basic" (*ibid.*, p. 25).

Post-Soviet Russia thus developed an intellectual milieu that inclined toward a geopolitical and, at the same time, cultural civilizationist thinking. One of the labels that varieties of this thinking received in the literature and media discourse was "neo-Eurasianism." Intellectuals like Aleksandr Panarin and Aleksandr Dugin are sometimes gathered under this label. On the other hand, the validity of this label, as well as general intellectual continuity between different strands, or stages of what is identified as "Eurasianism" has been convincingly contested (see Laruelle 2001; Umland 2007). The writings and political activism of Panarin and Dugin have been examined in detail by Laruelle and Umland, and this is one reason I do not include them in my analysis at greater length.

However, considering the share of publicity Dugin received in the West in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, the relevance of his rather pro-

lific writing to our research problem has to be discussed separately. In methodological terms, assessing the relative impact and significance of a certain discursive practice is always a basic problem. On the one hand, there have been studies demonstrating how Dugin managed to socialize himself into the Russian establishment, impregnating it with his doctrines (Umland 2007). On the other hand, scholars have also cautioned against overestimating the influence of his ideas, which at a certain point seemed to have become a media trend (on this, see Laruelle 2015). Indeed, in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis Dugin enjoyed increased attention in the Western media. Some even attributed to him the role of an “ideologist” or “mastermind” behind Russia’s new expansionism, such as when he is referred to as “Putin’s brain” in a title in a piece in *Foreign Affairs* (Barbashin and Thoburn 2014).

This image is certainly flattering to Dugin himself who, as Umland (2007), for instance, demonstrates, was always extremely active in increasing his symbolic capital as expert and ideologist. Yet, as Laruelle convincingly argued in response, this mediatized image was also rather lopsided. It left out other currents of radical anti-Western thought in Russia, as well as notable facts, such as Dugin’s dismissal from his position at the Moscow Lomonosov State University right in the midst of the Ukrainian conflict (Laruelle 2015). Overall, Dugin as a media phenomenon seems to have had a fate similar to that of Karl Haushofer in the American media during World War II.¹

This kind of mythmaking is precisely what this study would like to avoid. It does not want to attribute Russia’s recent conflictual attitude to the influence on the ruling class of one teaching, be it Dugin’s or somebody else’s. Rather, it attempts to point to the multiple currents that gradually shaped the intellectual environment and, eventually, came to supply the authorities’ discourse with some of its key concepts. This is a model of ideological diffusion rather than direct influence. It pays attention to the broader intellectual milieu instead of speculating about any straightforward connection between ideological entrepreneurs and Russian authorities.

¹ For a very interesting account of how American policy journals constructed the myth of Haushofer as the omniscient geopolitical “mastermind” behind Nazi policies, see Toal 1996.

Huntington's Russian adventure and the roots of civilizational thinking

A particular reading of Huntington's thesis played a paramount role in the Russian discourse on civilizations. The doctrine of the "clash of civilizations" was borrowed from the West by post-Soviet intellectuals and academics and became an established ideology in Russia. This borrowing can be seen as part of a longer track of ideological exchanges between Russia and the West. Scholars previously observed that Russia had been in an asymmetric position vis-à-vis its constitutive other because it stood as a net importer of its ideologies. "The Russian state," writes Neumann (1996), "spent the eighteenth century copying contemporary European models, the nineteenth century representing the Europe of the anciens régimes, which the rest of Europe had abandoned, and the twentieth century representing a European socialist model which most of the rest of Europe never chose to implement." Huntington himself observes on a similar note that during its Communist period Russia "imported a Western ideology, adapted it to Russian conditions and then challenged the West in the name of that ideology" (1993, p. 43).

Apparently, the practice of importing and reexporting Western ideologies should also not be seen as limited to one single case. Ironically, Huntington's own doctrine of a multicivilizational world order seems to have suffered a fate similar to the one he attributes to Marxism. Huntington's model of international relations found a highly receptive audience in Russia. In 2001 Boris Mezhuiev, a conservative intellectual, later to become deputy editor-in-chief for *Izvestia*, voiced a revealing reflection:

Before "The Clash of Civilizations?" article appeared in *Foreign Affairs* the name of the American scholar was only known to a few dozens of experts, who knew Huntington thanks to his works on modernization theory and comparative politics. Publishing a Russian translation of "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Polis* [Political research] (issue 1, 1994) brought Huntington almost a nearly Russia-wide fame [vserossiyskaya izvestnost].

The article was more than “appropriate for its time” [sov-yevremennaya]. Russia had just begun to come to itself after the democratic “intoxication” of 1989–1991, gradually starting to feel as a “dowerless girl” [bespridannitsa], who had just spent a passionate night but was never proposed marriage. Through the lips of Brzezinski they were letting Russia know that, as the country who lost the Cold War, it could not hope for any particular feeling of attachment from the victorious. Through the lips of Fukuyama, they suggested Russia doubt the existence of its own “national interests” and entrust the task of protecting Russian-speaking minorities in the Near Abroad to the competent experts from the “world civilized community.” It is natural that in Russia—as it was forced to endure these statements—an instinctive fascistoid protest was mounting against the contemporary world order, in which Russia was offered a seat that was far from honorable. (Mezhuev 2001)

So Huntington, continues Mezhuev, came to be a real treasure. That is, despite the fact that, in the eyes of some intellectuals, it was still a theory tailored to serve Western global leadership. Huntington’s article had, allegedly, changed the basic “frame” through which international politics was being perceived: “Post-Communist Russia, as the core of a unique, Orthodox-Slavic civilization, was offered to make itself at home not only on its own territory, but in the whole area of the Orthodox *oikoumene*. At the same time, it was told that in case of a civilizational self-determination [civilizacionnoye samoopredeleniye] of this kind, the door to Europe would be shut for her.”

Accordingly, “after Fukuyama and Brzezinski such an offer looked like a gift.” Reading Huntington in the 1990s, according to Mezhuev, taught Russia “political and cultural independence.” It was a “painful” but “necessary” procedure of becoming aware of its “civilizational solitude” [civilizacionnoye odinochestvo]. The point of this procedure was in “snatching conceptual power from the outer world” (ibid.).

These reflections are telling on several points. But one aspect not discussed in them has to do with the fact that intellectual bandwagoning with Huntington may have not only changed the “frame” of thinking as perceived by Russian intellectuals. It supplied the practices of civilizational identity construction with a foreign alibi. Quoting a

Western scholar adds to the air of impartiality with regard to its basic category of civilization. And an American political scientist who thinks in tune with Arnold J. Toynbee, Oswald Spengler and other intellectual darlings of the Russian civilizational approach opens opportunities of anchoring the approach in what can then be reconstructed as a long and shared intellectual tradition.

The point of concern here is not the borrowing or exchange of ideas per se. After all, Russia and what is known to the Russians as “the West” have not been encapsulated intellectual monads—as some of the more radical adherents of the civilizational approach would argue. They have historically formed a shared intellectual space across which not only technological achievements, but also ideas on society and culture traveled successfully. That is demonstrated, *inter alia*, by the similarity in views between Russian Slavophile civilizationism (Danilevsky) and European “civilizational” thinkers like Spengler. The point is, rather, the particular selectivity. As Mezhuev himself admits, Huntington’s democratization scholarship barely interested anyone as compared to the “clash of civilizations” model, whose audience, on the contrary, extended far beyond the academic circles.

In Western debates the seduction of comprehensive simplicity and a great deal of essentialization put into Huntington’s model is checked by at least two aspects. Firstly, Huntington himself keeps a degree of critical distance toward this particular model, acknowledging that “no paradigm is eternally valid” and neither is it able to account for “everything that is happening in global politics” (*ibid.*). And his aspirations to be useful to policymakers in effect place him midway between a social scientist and a policy expert. Secondly, and perhaps much more importantly, Huntington’s essentialism is balanced by the harsh peer criticism he receives in English-speaking academia. “While considerably in vogue abroad, ‘clashing civilizations’ thesis has encountered substantial resistance at home,” observe Rubenstein and Crocker (1994, p. 114).

Both aspects, however, seem to get lost in translation to other intellectual environments. In particular, this concerns the intellectual environment that breeds the Russian civilizational approaches. Indeed, as some scholars have reflected, it is the doctrinal rather than the reflexive and social scientific aspects of Western thought that the Russian intellectual establishment seems to have been specifically keen on. “There is no doubt,” observed Alexander Astrov in his 2005 article

dealing with the state of the art in the Russian international relations theory, “that in the West, especially in the USA there is a long and intimate connection between the academia and the authorities. There is also no shortage of studies on this connection. And yet, it takes a great deal of prejudice in order to be creating—for years in a row—an image of the Western theory of international relations, built on works of political activists such as Huntington, Fukuyama or Brzezinski, that do not occupy any significant place in the cannon of Western universities” (Astrov 2005).

Astrov’s general assessment of some of the mentioned authors as “political activists” may be challenged on the grounds of it being too narrow and ignoring their social scientific achievements—if only we do not assume that scientists can also sometimes switch on the political activist mode when writing some of their texts. In any case, Astrov’s note captures rather well the particular lopsidedness of the way in which Western thought on world politics was received in Russia. General knowledge of the global IR tradition there is rather poor. As a result, there is, indeed, a particular fixation on selected figures, among which Fukuyama and Huntington play an especially important role as icons of two opposite worldviews, one announcing the triumph of Western liberal universalism, the other heralding its decline (cf. Mezhuiev’s (2001) passage I cited earlier). Conceptual categories, thus, become involved in a binarizing practice that organizes handpicked Western theories and theorists according to the well-known “good cop/bad cop” principle.

Morozov follows up on Astrov’s complaints, explaining that the “polar structure” of the Russian disciplinary field of international relations is not organized according to the conventional “watersheds” between rationalists and constructivists, or, as seen from inside the rationalist paradigm, between (neo)realists and (neo)liberals. Instead, it is “structured around the political opposition between two foreign policy ideologies—Atlanticism and Eurasianism” (Morozov 2011, pp. 64–65). Social scientific categories become enmeshed in a discourse whose primary nature is identitary and not scientific (hence the image of “omnipresent identity [vezdesushiyaya identichnost]” Morozov uses in the title of his article). “The development of Russian political science,” observes Morozov, “is determined to a significant degree not by the intrascientific factors, but by a general and pervasive concern

about identity problems, and in the first place the nation-state identity of Russia. Issues that remain central for our social scientists are the questions of whether Russia belongs to Europe, its relation to the West and other problems of the, ‘civilizational status’ of Russian society” (ibid., p. 62).

Thus, Huntington, as well as Fukuyama in the role of his main antagonist, play a central role in Russian discourses on civilization. To say that Huntingtonian ideas are the only source of civilizational vocabularies would naturally be an oversimplification. Obviously, there is a long, even if interrupted, tradition of thinking “civilizational” in Russian reflections on the national Self. However, importing the “clash of civilizations” as a doctrine on international politics plays an important part in their contemporary constitution.

It is logical to assume that different discursive resources can enjoy different degrees of legitimacy, and, consequently, can have different empowering effects on those who avail of them in their discursive practices. Consequently, civilizational vocabularies enjoy legitimacy on several points. Linking its categories to Western academia, more specifically, to the “end of history”/“clash of civilizations” binarization is one sort of alibi. The alleged scientificity of the civilizational approach, as opposed to the purely political practices of nationalism, provides it with a naturalized and depoliticized air. Finally, the institutionalization of civilizationist approaches in textbooks and curricula ensures that this particular set of discursive resources is broadly recognizable and can have a broader public appeal.

As far as discursive resources of constructing Russia’s supranational identity are concerned, the civilizational approach is thus one of the two primary sets connected to the respective identitary frames of cultural and economic regionalism. Both the economic and cultural vocabularies are cases of “importing” an ideology, if we are to use Huntington’s term. Viewed from another theoretical perspective they can also be seen as cases of “hybridized agency,” or partial acceptance of the hegemonic language (see Bhabha 1994).

On the other hand, the case of the civilizational approaches is yet more complex and presents several layers of ideological exchanges and borrowing. As the empirical analysis in this book also suggests, they continue to embrace not only the recently imported clash of civilizations doctrine (or earlier ideas of Western authors such as Toynbee

or Spengler), but an established Russian tradition of civilizational thinking. Ultimately, however, the origins of this tradition are traced back to earlier practices of importing ideas from the West, namely, to the speaking position of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals that Neumann identifies as the “Romantic nationalist position which was formed under the influence of German Romanticism” (1996, p. 13).

In general, it has been argued that a great deal of Russian ideologies advocating national authenticity as well as an unbreachable ontological gap with the “West” can be traced back relatively easily to their Western intellectual origins. Laruelle makes this point in her study of the early Eurasianist “civilizational” philosophy that, very much like the works of the Slavophiles, reveals a high degree of intellectual dependence on those whom it tries to other:

[I]t is important to place Eurasianism back into its international historical context: Russian narratives on identity do not make any claims unheard of in any other country. Russian intellectuals’ thinking about politics never departs from an ideological framework that is of Western origin. Even the Eurasianists, the most brilliant defenders of insurmountable national distinctiveness, are, unwittingly, part and parcel of European intellectual history. (Laruelle 2008, p. 16)

Apparently, the expatriated Eurasianist intellectuals, whom Laruelle discusses, were a particularly remarkable example as their will to difference was spurred not only by intellectual dependence on European thought, but also by their struggle to juxtapose themselves with their everyday cultural environment. Characteristically then, the intention of producing difference with discursive resources that were borrowed from those also subject to practices of othering led to paradoxical results:

On a philosophical level, Eurasianism borrowed from German Romanticism, although politically it was closer to the modernity of Italian Fascism and Soviet totalitarianism. It was literally imbued with German thought (despite officially rejecting it as “Romano-Germanic”), both of the nineteenth and of the early twentieth century. Although it considered itself genuinely innovative and purely national, rooted solely in the Russian experience,

Eurasianism was actually part and parcel of the European history of ideas, from *Naturphilosophie* to conservative revolution, and it embodied a fusion between the Russian imperial past terminated by the Russian revolution and the Western crisis of the interwar period. (Ibid., p. 31)

Intellectual precursors to official civilizationism

Prior to the introduction of official platforms for civilizational rhetoric, such as the Russian World Foundation (established 2007), one can discover more than one attempt to articulate a civilizational identity for Russia. These attempts take place in a number of different intellectual milieus that had existed since the 1990s or early 2000s. Some of those milieus were associated with the Russian Orthodox Church, its conservative and anti-Western elements and can therefore be loosely typified as religious traditionalist articulations. In this chapter I analyze several of those and demonstrate how they picked up on the old theme of distinguishing between the Russian Self and the Western Other via arguments on spiritual and ontological difference between civilizations. Other articulations of civilizationism have a more secular background. Their authors were active on public platforms that fall into the category of new “nationalist think tanks” cataloged by Laruelle (2009). They rely on statements about differences in culture and values to construct a distinct Russian civilization. In effect, these attempts became an exercise in what Verkhovsky and Pain (2010) label “civilizational nationalism.” Yet other articulations used the term “civilization” to construct a narrative that rehabilitates Russia’s Soviet past or at least suggests rethinking it in abstraction from the Communist ideology and rather as a way of life and a historical experience that had both positive and negative aspects.

Generally speaking, there is a number of different contexts in which “civilization” was used in semi-official discourse prior to the rise of official civilizationism. This fact demonstrates both the popularity that the term gained in various intellectual milieus and the plurality of ways in which it could be used to produce narratives on Russian identity. I argue that this plurality stems from the inherent polysemy of the term “civilization” itself, making it a convenient

“nodal point” for articulatory practice. As the next chapter demonstrates this polysemy of civilization has important implications for official identity-building practices. Yet much of it is also evident in that bulk of semi-official discourses which largely preceded the civilizational turn in the official rhetoric. In the remaining sections of this chapter I map out these discourses and identify the intellectual milieus they originated in.

Discourse on the “Soviet civilization”

The discourse of a “Soviet civilization” in post-Soviet Russia is interesting in virtue of how it articulates historical continuity across political and ideological ruptures in Russia’s tragic and turbulent history. Thus, inventing its own form of essentialist ontology allows civilizationism to follow geopolitics in the depoliticizing strategy of distinguishing between political regimes and ideologies on the one hand, and civilizations as more fundamental or enduring entities on the other.

The notion of a distinct “Soviet civilization” has been advanced by political essayists like Sergei Kara-Murza. Kara-Murza’s collection of writings, published in 2001, swarmed with strongly anti-Western sentiments and bitterness about the collapse of “the Soviet [social] order [sovetskiy stroy]” that proposed an alternative to a Westernized global order: “The present-day state of Russia,” wrote Kara-Murza in his introduction,

is only an episode in our Time of Troubles, that overlaps with the incessant hot–cold war of the “golden billion” for the nourishing saps of the Earth. In this war the Soviet project was a bur in the throat for the fascist global race. Realized in its first stage, as the USSR, it showed, through a difficult trial-and-error process, that a society can live without a split into the chosen and the miserable. And humanity is possible, organized as a family, a “symphony” of peoples, and not as a global apartheid, a version of neo-Pagan slave holding.

Kara-Murza bridged different ideological formations of Russian history by arguing that the Soviet social order had its roots in Russian culture,

and belonged to the “communal type of civilizations [obshinnye civilizacii]” as opposed to Western “market civilizations.” He also called for a reassessment of the Soviet period in Braudelian terms, by writing a history of the “structures of Soviet everyday life.”

Arguably, the strategy of thinking about the past beyond ideology dovetails rather well with societal nostalgia for the Soviet period. The latter is naturally more prone to refer to everyday personal experiences than to ideology or political practice. Kara-Murza’s writings won him a considerable degree of popularity in Russia. His *Manipulating with Consciousness* (2008), which had a strong focus on exposing the role of Western myth-making in destroying the Soviet social order, was placed by the *Kommersant* newspaper among the twenty best-selling books of political essays in Russia. Umland complained in his 2008 op-ed that “the Russian book market is experiencing a glut of vituperative political lampoons whose main features include pathological anti-Americanism, absurd conspiracy theories, apocalyptic visions of the future, and bizarre fantasies of national rebirth. Among the more or less widely read authors of such concoctions are Sergei Kurginyan, Igor Shafarevich, Oleg Platonov, Maxim Kalashnikov (a.k.a. Vladimir Kucherenko), and Sergei Kara-Murza” (Umland 2008).

Yet, remarkably, the strategy of reassessing the Soviet experience in civilizational terms was not reserved to authors of “absurd conspiracy theories.” For example, Vladislav Inozemtsev, an established Russian liberal, suggests that, notwithstanding its “ordeals” and “unprecedented atrocities,” the Soviet period in Russian history was unique in making Russia “the center of a civilization with global significance.” “A civilization,” continued Inozemtsev,

inscribes its name into the annals of history with great accomplishments and achievements of material culture. One cannot deny, that many landmarks of our history—from the industrialization in the 1930s and the great Victory to the reaching of nuclear parity and Gagarin’s spaceflight—were results of the heroic deeds of those who were counterpart to what the American journalist Tom Brokaw called “the greatest generation.” They grew old in the 1970s and the Soviet system grew old with them, and today we realize that we are unable not only to improve but even to repeat much of what was created in those years.

Inozemtsev finishes but proposing to establish a research institute for Soviet civilization.

Notably, these reflections come from someone whose intellectual credentials as a Russian Westernizer or liberal are difficult to contest. That illustrates how the strategy of rethinking the Soviet period in abstraction from ideology, in cultural civilizational terms, can be found across the ideological spectrum. This, in turn, suggests that, however radical or marginal, the intellectual activism of political essayists like Kara-Murza was responsive a broader post-Soviet demand for reconciling historical legacies. As I demonstrate in the next chapter, this demand was key to shaping the ideological strategies of Putin's regime that were responsive to the growing Soviet nostalgia following the turbulent post-Soviet 1990s. Putin's attempts to reconcile the Soviet with the non-Soviet in Russia's official identity was evident in steps like the decision to bring back the Soviet anthem, albeit with somewhat updated words. With respect to Neumann's "John the Baptist" dilemma of isolating discursive predecessors we could thus say that civilizationism was put to the task of constructing historical continuity across ideological ruptures well before "civilization" became a nodal point in elite identity-production practices.

Religious traditionalist articulations

Religious traditionalist articulations, built around the notions of an "Orthodox" and/or "Russian civilization," typically emerged from intellectual milieus associated with the Russian Orthodox Church and were sometimes supported by its influential functionaries. Such was, for example, the Institute for Russian Civilization, created in 2003 to commemorate and develop the ideas of the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga Ioann (Snychev), who, according to Parland, was "the most outspoken clerical traditionalist with extreme views" (2005, p. 8). The Institute was preceded by the "Encyclopedia of Russian Civilization" research and publishing center, established in 1997 by Oleg Platonov, an associate of Snychev. Umland places Platonov, together with Dugin and Kara-Murza, into the category of anti-Western essayists forming the ideological currents of Russian "uncivil society" (2007, p. 31). The Institute for Russian Civilization set as its official goal system-

atizing the knowledge on “all questions of Russian civilization, history, philosophy, ethnography, culture, art and other branches of science” as well as publishing the “greatest books of Russian thinkers reflecting the main landmarks in the development of the Russian national world-view [mirovozzreniye] and the opposition of Russia to the forces of the universal evil, Russophobia and racism.” As part of its series, the Institute publishes classical text of Russian Slavophile religious and conservative thinkers like Danilevsky, Ilyin or Dostoyevsky as well as more recent works by Russian traditionalists and nationalists such as Vadim Kozhinov, Igor Shafarevich, Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev) and Platonov himself.

Another religious traditionalist articulation belongs to the Center for Dynamic Conservatism (subsequently renamed the Izborsk Club). The Center garnered a degree of fame as a result of its 2005 publication of Serge’s Project (Sergiyevskiy project), referring to Serge of Radonezh, a much revered medieval Orthodox saint. Also known as the Russian Doctrine, the project was a voluminous document, whose declared goal was to serve as “platform for a broad coalition of society’s patriotic forces” and as “a weapon of consciousness,” able to protect the national mentality from “destructive influences.”

The doctrine, according to its authors,

postulates as the necessary condition of the nation’s survival and sovereignty, not only “sovereignty” and formal “independence” of the guarded borders, but independence of the spirit and will. The rebirth and the new ascension of Russian civilization will not begin without a “return to the Self.” It is necessary to find one’s own [svoyo], organic Self. It is in our otherness [inakovost’], dissimilarity to others, that is, in our civilizational independence [civilizacionnaya samostoyatel’nost’], that the guarantee lies to our possible gains and success on the paths of History. If the global triumph of the liberal paradigm and liberal world order was meant to become reality, if the myth of the “end of history” came true, it would turn to be literally the End of History, as it would mean a qualitative degradation of humankind. The true mechanism of History, the mechanism of development lies in diversity of civilizational codes, including diversity of political systems, of distinctive culture and even in diversity of different

kinds of market economies, in their competition and—at the same time—their creative interaction. The cycles of globalization and universal integration are necessarily replaced by cycles of disintegration and restoration of a new balance of nations and civilizations.

Following up on the notion of sovereignty as “spiritual independence” from the “liberal paradigm,” the authors described the role of Russia as fulfilling a universal role of making the world “stable” and “balanced,” being entitled to its own “global project”:

There cannot be many global projects as there cannot be many powerful and original [samobytnye] civilizational worlds [civilizacionnyye miry]. There are five to six contenders in the world for the role of such players. And Russia has full right to belong to these few. Having become aware of our spiritual sovereignty [duchovnaya suverennost], on the basis of tradition and taking into account the challenges of our time, having creatively rethought our civilizational program [civilizacionnaya programma], we can (and, in the face of history, we must) formulate our own Russian global project. The crisis of the “Anglo-Saxon” project raises the issue of world leadership. The integrational potential of Russian civilization once again meets with demand from history.

Naturally, neither culturally defined exceptionalism, nor messianism put forth by the doctrine are anything new or very counterintuitive for the Russian intellectual tradition. Allusions to Fukuyama are also an established ritual in post-Soviet ideological practice. What is more remarkable is the creolization of narratives we witness. Romantic, cultural civilizationist notions (“one’s own,” “organic”) intermingle closely with categories borrowed from realist discourse on international relations (e.g., “balance” and “stability”). The image of the “selected few,” capable of forming “civilizational worlds” is reminiscent of the more conventional notion of great power exclusivity.

Constructs such as “spiritual sovereignty” attest to the ideational syncretism I referred to in the previous chapter. They effectively hybridize political legal and religious vocabularies.

What is yet more important is the particular status of this discourse. I argued that the civilizational turn in official identity-building practices was anticipated by multiple intellectual precursors. The ideological practice of these forerunners may seem to have had a relatively marginal status at a glance. However, the subsequent diffusion of many these terms into the official discourse is no coincidence. Retrospectively, multiple interesting connections can be traced between what is sometimes called “the lunatic fringe” and the not-so-marginal public figures and officials.

Thus, the authors of the Russian Doctrine, as Laruelle also observes, enjoyed public support from Kirill (Gundyaev), then Metropolitan of Kaliningrad and Smolensk. Kirill popularized the doctrine that resonated, in particular, with his later ideas on a conservative modernization, understood as modernization based firmly on traditional Russian values. Verkhovsky and Pain (2010, p. 189) report that the Doctrine was, at some point, also seriously considered by members of the Center for Social and Conservative Policy, United Russia’s ideological club and think tank. Furthermore, the ideological endeavors of the Center for Dynamic Conservatism received support from the Russian Entrepreneur Foundation. This foundation, which worked “in close collaboration” with the Moscow Patriarchate (Laruelle 2009, p. 77), also seems to have cooperated actively with Patriotic Platform, a political club inside the United Russia Party. Overall, observing various sites of discourse production in Russia, such as think tanks, foundations, parties, movements and ministries, invokes the image of a spiderweb. Private and official ideological practices cohabitate and overlap in one intellectual environment. Groups of “experts” migrate from one shared discursive site to another, often assuming multiple positions in structures that are not part of the government, but can be said to form its broader intellectual establishment. Arguably then, the role of these semi-official “John the Baptists” with respect to official discourse can be seen as not merely anticipating, but often informing it and suggesting conceptual solutions to the elite discursive practice. Concepts and vocabularies elaborated at their sites of ideological production and thus find their ways into official speeches and policy documents after a while.

Russia as a civilization state

One notable example of concepts migrating from semi-official to official discourses is the representation of Russia as a “civilization state [gosudarstvo-civilizacia].” Putin reverted to the term in his 2012 campaign article which I analyze in subsequent chapters. The concept surfaced again next year in his address to the upper chamber of parliament. The notion, however, had been elaborated somewhat earlier by the Institute for National Strategy. The Institute is presided over by Mikhail Remizov. Remizov, who is a prominent conservative intellectual, made a number of important conceptual contributions to the debate on the Russian nation and nationalism. In terms of his political stance he seems to belong to the type of a new (and ambiguous) Russian nationalism that, in the words of Popescu (2010), is “not entirely postimperial.” It combines a degree territorial revisionism with skepticism toward former imperial territories such as Central Asia, because they are inhabited by what is viewed as civilizationally alien populations.

On the one hand, Remizov seems to suggest that the Russian nation-building process has been a victim of its own state-building project. Thus, he denounces post-Soviet Russian federalism, arguing that it was not a civic nation as the official doctrines claimed, but a product of administrative borders fashioned top-down by the ruling bureaucracy (*nomenklatura*). “The Russian nation is born not from a concentration of historical will, but as a product of disintegration of the Soviet system, as inertia of its disintegration.” By that rationale, genuine nation building in Russia remains unfinished and still requires a sense of community between Russians. Thus, viewing the post-Soviet condition rather as kind of a transitional arrangement, Remizov pointed to various options of “reuniting” with the “30 million Russians” left beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. He suggested the doctrine of “many countries—one people” as “a formula of relations with the Russian population of Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and other newly formed states.” He also tends to view Russia’s regionalist initiatives from this perspective. “Regional integration” he wrote in 2013, is “not an end in itself, but an instrument to advance Russia’s national interests, including the creation of conditions for reunification of the Russian people inside one space—if not political, then social-

economic and cultural.” On the other hand, he expressed reservation accepting the Central Asian republics into the Eurasian Customs Union, suggesting that they have become too distant from Russia’s “civilizational standards.”

Remizov, thus, elaborated a particular form of partial territorial revisionism that filters geopolitics and geoeconomics through a cultural civilizational lens. In terms of its spatial imaginary it does not exactly fit into the category of purely postimperial “defensive nationalism” used by Popescu (2010). It does not shy away from geopolitics or great power thinking. For instance, Remizov greets the reactivation of Eurasian economic integration in 2007–2010 as “a confirmation of the minimum of [Russia’s] geopolitical capacity [geopoliticheskaya deеспosobnost’]” and ability to pursue regional integration as “a form of the politics of influence that is key to modern powers.”

The approach to defining Russia’s identity that Remizov and the Institute for National Strategy elaborate can be said to combine an ethnocultural focus with concerns about Russia’s international and geopolitical status. Notably, the Institute’s expertise has drawn on civilizational narratives, using terms such as “civilizational decline” to reflect on Russia’s condition.

A 2008 Institute for National Strategy report urged Russia to fashion its own “geocultural and geopolitical project.” The project was to be described in terms of a “civilization state.” “In its internal development” this “civilization state” was to be “founded on the religious cultural values of the historical Russia and civilizational achievements [civilizacionnyye zavoyevaniya] of Soviet modernity” (that is, in ideological terms, a certain synthesis of conservatism and socialism). The foundation of its foreign policy was to be “a gradual integration of Russia and its potential regional allies into a united economic and military-strategic ‘great area’ [bolshoye prostranstvo] [a Russian rendition of Carl Schmitt’s ‘*Grossraum*’—A.K.] and partnership with those global centers of power that are interested in cooperating against the threats borne by transnational globalization” (Institut Natsional’noy Strategii 2005).

In 2005 the Institute put forth a project of the new Russian constitution that also defined Russia as a “civilization state.” The authors’ foreword described the current constitution as fixating Russia “between two disintegrations”: the collapse of the USSR and the possible

breakup of the Russian Federation. The crisis of post-Soviet Russian statehood, the authors argued, called for the unsustainable model of “nation-state” to be replaced by the “civilization state” as “a cultural-historic space of basic values that legitimize power and legal order” (Institut Natsional’noy Strategii 2005, p. 4). In its redefinition of Russia’s identity, the constitution project addresses several of its fragmentation lines. Thus, Article 1 defines Russia’s historical continuity with “the USSR, the Russian Empire, the Duchy of Muscovy, and the ancient Rus” as stages in development of Russian civilization (Institut Natsional’noy Strategii 2005, p. 7). Article 4, dedicated to “the territory of Russia and the historical space of Russia” states that “the Constitution of Russia enjoy supremacy over the whole territory of Russia. In those parts of Russia’s historical space to which Russia’s sovereignty does not extend at the moment of its adoption, the Constitution will be effective from the moment of their reunification with Russia.” Moreover, “the historical space of Russia is constituted by areas traditionally populated by indigenous peoples [korennyye narody] of Russia, that were part of state entities [gosudarstvennyye obrazovaniya] to which Russia exercises historical succession. Russia secures the interests of its indigenous peoples throughout the whole historical space of Russia.”

The project was further accompanied by a collection of commentaries, with Remizov’s article explaining the status of a “civilization state” vis-à-vis Western normative standards. As opposed to “civilization state,” argued Remizov, “nation-states,” understood as “political” or civic nations, can enjoy only limited sovereignty. Roots of the modern civic nation-state lie in the French Revolution document “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” (1789) and its two principles: the principle of human rights and the principle of popular sovereignty. The more they develop, the further the universalist liberal principles of democracy and human rights limit their fellow state-building principle of popular sovereignty. This supremacy of the human rights principle is part of the “pseudoreligious cult of the ‘natural man’” that symbolizes “the community of the modern European civilizational project.” In the status of a nation-state, Russia—as someone who does not belong to the “nucleus” of this “civilizational project”—can only enjoy “conditional sovereignty,” forever struggling “to prolong its recognition from the neoimperial ‘center of civilization’ referred to as the ‘world community’” (Institut Natsional’noy Strategii 2005, pp.

59–61). Seen as a “civilization state,” however, Russia does not have its roots in the French Revolution and does not recognize the supremacy of its principles (Institut Natsional’noy Strategii 2005, pp. 58–60). But this particular othering of contemporary Europe as a secular, “revolutionary” project does not entail a radical break with Europe as such. A counterhegemonic partial identification with “Europe” is preserved, as the notion of “Europe” becomes contested and reinterpreted:

Europe as a local civilization and the European civilizational project are not identical concepts. This civilizational project is secular, technicist and individualist. As it crystallized multiple options were put aside of another Europe [drugaya Evropa]—to which Russia is directly related. As the heir of the Byzantine Empire, as the power that for several centuries patronized the conservative and then the socialist Europe, Russia can and must integrate into its civilizational project the resources of another Europe. (Institut Natsional’noy Strategii 2005, p. 65)

Hence, defining Russia as a “civilization state” also preserves an ambiguity in its stance vis-à-vis its constitutive Other.

Examining the various doctrines on civilizationism we can, thus, come to the conclusion that official identity-building practices that we are examining in the period of 2007–2013 were, in many ways, anticipated by intellectual precursors who had provided a broad pool of ideas to draw on. This pool has apparently been shaped by multiple factors. In the broader perspective we cannot ignore the contribution of things like the influence of school curricula and the establishment of civilizationism as a legitimate academic and expert vocabulary in Russia. The political rise of culturalist, civilizational rhetoric thus has its roots in a particular intellectual culture. Furthermore, this culture has been sustained and developed by a number of ideological initiatives that worked to develop ideas on Russia as a distinct civilization. These initiatives have had various degrees of association with the official establishment and have apparently shaped its discourse at least to some extent.

On the other hand, the role of rightist, conservative and anti-Western ideological entrepreneurs should not be interpreted in the sense of direct influence, as it is done, for example, by those who tend to overblow Dugin’s role in influencing Putin’s policies. Rather,

it should be understood in terms of a slow diffusion process whereby certain concepts and ideas make their way into the official rhetoric and become ideological linchpins of policymaking.

Finally, as I argue in the next chapter, there are also specific social and political reasons why the vocabularies of civilizationism were likely to be adopted as a source of identity construction by the official establishment. In the next chapter I focus more on these reasons, showing how ideas of a civilization as a culturally defined unity can be instrumental to articulating identity across the multiple lines of fragmentation that the post-Soviet Russian society faced.

CHAPTER 4

A “Russian Civilization”: Constructing Unity across Fragmentation

The previous chapter argued that cultural civilizational discourses established themselves as a legitimate language in Russia. They have done so *inter alia* by bandwagoning with selected foreign scholars, as well as through the educational system, thus gaining a broader societal legitimacy. The chapter also pointed out a number of unofficial or semi-official intellectual milieus in post-Soviet Russia that had reproduced the ideas of a Russian civilization prior to the rise of the Russian world doctrines. These milieus existed as think tanks, public initiatives or fora of intellectuals and they anticipated the rise of civilizationism as an official discourse. Some of the ideas they reproduced later migrated to the official rhetoric. Such was, for instance, the concept of Russia as a “civilization state” (by implication, distinct from “nation-state”) which later surfaced in Vladimir Putin’s campaign articles.

This chapter brings the reader closer to the official strand of civilizationist discourse. It argues that opting for the “Russian civilization” and “Russian world” discourse as a strategy of building Russian identity should be understood in a specific historical, social and political context. This context is characterized by multiple challenges to Russia’s post-Soviet identity. In my analysis I label these challenges lines of fragmentation. Consequently, I conceptualize civilizational discourse of the Russian establishment in accordance with Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) theory of discourse, i.e., as articulatory practices that attempt to overcome fragmentation or “suture” the post-Soviet Russian identity.

I further argue that the discourse of civilizationism presents a particularly favorable opportunity for these articulatory practices, owing to its inherent polysemy. In Chapter 2 I discussed polysemy as a key aspect that enables “contingent interventions” of the articulatory practice into the linguistic structure (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) or, put in terms of Bourdieu’s (1991) analogy, into the “linguistic market.” Polysemy is what creates the effect of the “common nouns” (Bourdieu 1991)—or “nodal points” in Laclau and Mouffe’s terminology—that are both shared and contested.

Seeing “civilization” as a polysemantic term is crucial for understanding of how civilizationist discourses operate. To some extent the polysemy of this concept is also sensed by those who are involved in reproducing the civilizational discourse. Thus, Vitaliy Averyanov, director of the Institute for Dynamic Conservatism (alias the Izborsk Club), complains about a “counterproductive polysemy” that two competing interpretations of “civilization” produce. The universalist notion understands civilization as a certain “stage in advancement” that is “primarily technological.” He begs instead to prioritize the understanding of civilization as “a specific cultural world, following [Arnold J.] Toynbee, [Pitirim] Sorokin and [Aleksandr] Panarin.”¹

Averyanov’s note is certainly accurate as far as discourses go in Russia. That basic ambiguity, indeed, strongly characterizes Russian political discourse and the word “civilization,” for instance, can easily have two meanings in one presidential address. Yet, based on my analysis of empirical sources, I argue that the polysemy of the term “civilization” in Russian discourses is considerably more complex.

Polysemy of the term “civilization” allows it to serve as a nodal point in which several related identitary discourses are anchored. These discourses strive to construct or “suture” Russia’s national identity across its multiple lines of fragmentation. I identified these lines of fragmentation as *territorial*, *societal*, *historical* and *ethnocultural*. Each of these lines corresponds to a specific aspect of the social context in which the discourse on Russian civilization is articulated. The territorial line of fragmentation refers to the discrepancies between the current, legally

¹ Averyanov, Vitaliy. 2011. Ob Arkhetipakh “Istoricheskoy Rossii” [On the archetypes of “Historical Russia”]. Izborsk Club. <http://www.dynacon.ru/content/articles/547/>. Accessed February 1, 2015.

defined borders of the Russian Federation and the persisting “geopolitical imaginaries” that are inspired by notions of a greater territorial past, reflected in concepts such as “historical Russia.” The societal or humanitarian line of fragmentation refers to a sense of having lost large numbers of kin population now resident in the “near” or even “far” abroad. This is reflected in notions such as “divided people.” The historical line of fragmentation refers to ruptures in ideological foundations of state-building projects which correspond to different periods of Russian history. Finally, the ethnocultural line of fragmentation refers to challenges of contemporary Russian federalism that has had only limited success in coping with national tensions inside Russia proper.

Below I demonstrate in more detail how these discourses of Russia as a civilization can be anchored in specific social and political contexts which can in turn give us a better understanding of how the discourse of “Russian civilization” or “Russian world” works and, indeed, *why* it may have come to operate on such a high political level.

“Dilemmas” of Russian identity: The post-Soviet “Russian world” as a space of contestation and uncertainty

Scholars have noted that the dynamics of Russia’s post-Soviet identity formation has been characterized by much uncertainty and ambiguity, in particular with regard to Russia’s spatial limits, its ideological foundations and its international status vis-à-vis external Others. These dilemmas are recognized not only by observers but by those who have been, more or less engaged in the practice of constructing Russian identity, also inside the discursive frame of “civilization.” Below I examine a volume published as a joint effort by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian World Foundation (RWF) under the title *The Russian World as a Civilizational Space* (Guseynov et al. 2011). Supported by a foundation grant, this intellectual endeavor presents a series of reflections provided by Russian philosophers on various aspects of Russia’s post-Soviet self. “Russia,” writes Guseynov in the foreword:

is presently still going through an identity crisis that came as a result of a disintegration of the state happening simultaneously with change in the social order [obshestvennyi stroi]. It is in the

process of seeking answers to questions about its place in the world and the consolidating foundations of its historical existence. The question of its place in the world concerns Russia's *civilizational status* and its role in the grand history [bolshaya istoriya]. There is a variety of opinions on the matter. They range from denying any substantial historical originality [samobytnost] (saying we are just like hundreds of other countries and peoples) to proclaiming an exceptional (*sui generis*) mission and responsibility for the future of humankind. (Guseynov 2011, p. 5, emphasis added)

These existential questions, continues Guseynov, are far from esoteric. Indeed, they represent standpoints of relatively large groups of people. Furthermore, he argues, the uncertainty about Russia's international stance is an extension of domestic uncertainty. "The drama of the situation, designated as the crisis of Russia's identity is as follows: we do not have, neither at the lower, everyday level of social consciousness, nor at its theoretical heights, a single or even a predominant opinion as to who we are or even how we are called" (*ibid.*).

In a similar vein another volume coeditor reflects on "intracivilizational dialog." He notes that although the theme of the "Russian world [Russkiy mir]" has been gaining prominence, there is still not even a minimal ideological consensus in Russian society that could serve as basis of a civic nation. The word "mir," he points out, has a double meaning in modern Russian, referring to both "world" and "peace," suggesting that "Russkiy mir" should also mean "peace among Russians." "On the contrary," he observes, in Russia "a war of discourses continues," a clash between irreconcilable ideological constructs that do not pursue dialog and gradual convergence, but mutual destruction acting according to the "winner-takes-it-all" principle (Kara-Murza 2011, p. 148).

This sort of highbrow pondering on the troubled national self is hardly new to the Russian intellectual tradition. The nineteenth-century Russian Slavophile–Westernizer debates also revolve around the issues of "civilizational status" and the problem of domestic ideological consensus. Characteristically, the genre survives into the twenty-first century with very similar intellectual points of departure for those who are engaged in the intellectual practices of the Russian world/civilization. As Guseynov's (2011) remarks also suggest, the post-Soviet period is strongly overshadowed by a transition trauma. The "disinte-

gration of the state" and the "change in the social order [obshestvennyi stroi]" as a specific historical experience, thus, overlap with the more traditional Russian questions of identity.

The post-Soviet transition trauma reveals much about contemporary Russian identity-building strategies. In terms of the specific social context of articulatory practice, it points to several discrepancies, or lines of fragmentation, in post-Soviet Russia's identity. Arguably, then, these discrepancies inform the practices of identity building pursued by the Russian political and intellectual establishment. Below, I outline these lines of fragmentation. First, however, a brief theoretical note is necessary to avoid potential misunderstandings. Conceptualizing Russian identity as being fragmented along multiple lines does not imply that I suggest dividing identities as such into those that are "fragmented" and those that are consistent or finalized. Huntington (1993) speaks of Russia as a "torn" country. Thereby he seems to suggest an exceptionality that is contrasted with less problematic identities of countries that are more homogenous and internally coherent in terms of their cultural civilizational belonging. I, on the other hand, suggest that a fully coherent and nondisturbed identity is most likely an imaginary, utopian condition. Every social identity is problematic and unstable in its own particular ways. This approach is grounded in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) social ontology of "absent totality." From their point of view identities are, in principle, bound to remain heterogeneous and unfinished as meanings can only partially be fixed around nodal points. Therefore, every identity can be problematized and deconstructed into its aggregate discursive practices. These practices aim at "suturing" a fragmented heterogeneity into a coherent whole. Consequently, the work of an analyst lies in examining those particular lines of fragmentation that create the context for identity formation and those practices that strive to overcome them. This is the analytical work performed in this chapter with regard to Russia's post-Soviet identity and its four lines of fragmentation.

The territorial fragmentation line: In search of "Great Russia"

The territorial line of fragmentation is related to the ambiguity of Russia's current spatial borders. This is an aspect referred to in Chapter

1. Gaidar (2007), who saw Russia as still hovering in the gray zone between its present as a federated nation-state and its imperial past, suggested that parting with a territorially integrated empire is a particularly painful experience as compared to the maritime type of empires. Or, as Tolz put it,

Whereas the break-up of overseas empires had had only a limited political effect on the metropolis, in the Russian/Soviet case, the end of empire disrupted the basic state structure. In December 1991 Russia's borders shrunk almost to those of Muscovy in the early seventeenth century. The answer to the question: "Who are we, the Russian people?" suddenly became more unclear than it had seemed to be for Russian nation builders when it was first posed in the eighteenth century. The related question of state-building has also proved to be very complicated. For centuries, Russia was the centre of an empire which was conceptualized as a Russian nation-state. This explains the confusion over what constitute the "just borders" of the post-communist Russian state, and over the membership of the Russian nation. (Tolz 2001, p. 235)

Discrepancy between the formal borders of Russian Federation and the lingering Russian geopolitical imaginaries produces what is sometimes called "phantom pains," a kind of hypersensitivity about former imperial territories. Compensating for the trauma of rapidly shifting borders alternative spatial delineations arise, such as "great" or "historical Russia," implying that its present version is a territorially abridged one. The words "historical Russia" notably surfaced in Putin's so-called Crimea speech, i.e., his address to the parliament and civil society representatives made in March 2014 on the issue of annexation.² But the term had a long preexistence in Russia's political discourse and was at the disposal of anyone willing to think of Russia outside its legal borders. Thus, certain semi-official ideologists of civilizationism have

² Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Address of the President of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia, March 18, 2014. <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/20603>. Page accessed December 10, 2014.

juxtaposed "historical Russia" to "national Russia" in what they see as a constitutive contradiction of Russian identity caught between the national and the "imperial" destiny.³ "Historical Russia" is also defined as "almost a synonym to Russian civilization, developing in time, and to the Russian civilizational world-subject." It is Russia as seen from the perspective of "generational conciliarity [sobornost' pokoleniy]," historical continuity encompassing several "civilizational cycles" associated with different territories, including the "Kievan and Moscow and Saint Petersburg" periods of Russian history.⁴

The spatial constructs of "great" or "historical" Russia have been activated in discourses on the Russian "near abroad." Political discourse framed post-Soviet integration as the task of "gathering lands" as opposed to giving them away (sobirat', a ne razdavay' zemli)⁵ and "restoring historical Russia in its historical borders."⁶ Mikhail Leontiev, a popular political commentator and a member of the Izborsk Club, compared post-Soviet integration to gathering dismembered limbs of the "great historical Russia." "We are collecting our body: we are sewing our leg on, our ear that was torn off, we are putting back the eye that was plucked out."⁷

³ Kozin, Nikolay. 2011. Osevyte tendentsii v istorii Rossii [Axial tendencies in Russian history]. *Strategy of Russia* 2 (February).

⁴ Vitalii Averyanov was director of the Institute for Dynamic Conservatism and Secretary of the Izborsk Club. Averyanov, Vitalii. 2011. Istoricheskaya Rossiya [Historical Russia]. *Strategy of Russia* 7 (July).

⁵ Putin podvergaet sil'neyshemu ispytaniyu nash natsional'no-patrioticheskiy lager'. Konstantin Zatulin—o tom, est' li u Rossii osoby put' [Putin puts our national patriotic camp to a serious test. Konstantin Zatulin on whether Russia has its distinct path]. *Izvestia*, January 24, 2012. <http://izvestia.ru/news/512953#ixzz3ReIyQ53Q>. Accessed February 1, 2015.

⁶ Sergei Baburin, during 2013 CSCP roundtable on Eurasian societal integration. CSKP: Stenogramma kruglogo stola "Evraziyskaya obshchestvennaya integratsiya. Novye perspektivy i vozmozhnosti" [CSPC: Transcript of the round table on "Eurasian societal integration. New perspectives and opportunities"]. CSPC, April 3, 2013. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11607/>. Accessed January 15, 2015.

⁷ Leontiev, Mikhail. 2012. "Esli SShA tak nervno reagiruyut, znachit, u nikh est' osnovaniya boyat'sya vrozozhdeniya SSSR" [Mikhail Leontiev: „If the USA reacts so nervously, it means they have reasons to be afraid of the USSR revival"]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, December 28.

The Russian Orthodox Church also worked out its own concept of historical Russia, built around the legacy of the Medieval Kievan Rus. In his address to the Twenty-seventh World Russian People's Council (2013), Patriarch Kirill stated that

Russia should be understood as a cultural multinational entity existing in the most specific historical and geographical dimension that is related to the Ancient Rus'. In a sense, Russia is synonymous to Rus'. Today we are facing a geopolitical reality in which independent states have arisen in the space of this historical Russia. Many of these states are also heirs to the historical Rus'. And so, when I speak of Russia, I always mean this great civilizational space.⁸

Earlier the Patriarch proposed introducing "Russian world country" ("strana Russkogo mira") as a specific term designating those nations that partake in the "civilizational community" [civilizacionnaya obshnost] of the "historical Rus": "We need to understand clearly," he urged in his address to the Third Assembly of the Russian World Foundation (2010),

what the Russian world is like today. I believe, that will have wronged the historical truth if we consider the Russian Federation in its contemporary borders to be its only center. If we do, we will artificially sever from ourselves the many millions that recognize their responsibility for the fate of the Russian world and see its construction as the main task of their lives. The core of the Russian world today is Russia, Ukraine and Belarus—according to the idea that St. Lawrence of Chernigiv expressed: "Russia, Ukraine and Belarus—that is the Holy Rus." It is this understanding of the Russian world that the name of our Church carries. The Church

⁸ Patriarch Kirill in his address to the seventeenth WRPC, officially dedicated to "Russia as a civilization-country." Slovo Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na XVII Vsemirnom Russkom Narodnom Sobore [Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to the XVII World Russian People's Council] 31.10.2013. World Russian People's Council. <http://www.vrns.ru/documents/76/2366/#.VWntts-qr18>. Accessed December 20, 2014.

is called Russian not according to the ethnic principle. The name shows that the Russian Orthodox Church fulfills its pastoral mission among peoples that accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as basis of their national identity, or, at least, as its essential part. This is why we also, in this sense, consider Moldova to be part of the Russian world.⁹

In terms of collective identity construction one important aspect of civilizational vocabularies lies in the way they simultaneously produce homo- and heterogeneity. Thus, the construct of civilization introduces a Self/Other structure that emphasizes cultural distinctness vis-à-vis other civilizations. As Laruelle notes, "civilizationism refers to the affirmation of cultural differentialism, ethno-differentialism, or cultural racism. These various terms describe a single idea—namely, that every nationality has unique specificities (cultural, ethnic, racial) that cannot be preserved without some form of segregation" (Laruelle 2010, p. 26).

Yet, there is another side to this coin. While difference is outsourced to the external other through a binarizing procedure, those located inside one civilization are simultaneously represented as united by common spiritual and historical traits. The advantage, specifically with respect to Russian fragmented territoriality, is that civilizationism allows the construction of homogeneity without coming into immediate conflict with the existing normative and legal structures of national sovereignty. Thus, Patriarch Kirill makes it a point that his "Russian world" doctrine does not challenge the existing state borders, though they are "creating excessive barriers between the peoples of the Russian world." He even cites the example of the European Union where sovereignty does not prevent countries from building "a most intimate relationship." Consequently, he argues, countries of the "historical Rus'" have even more substantial grounds to integrate as they belong to one unique "civilizational space [unikal'noye civilizatsionnoye prostranstvo]" (ibid.).

⁹ Patriarch Kirill in his address to the third Assembly of the Russian World Foundation. Svyateyshiyy Patriarkh Kirill. 2009. V osnove russkogo mira—pravoslavnaya vera [His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. Orthodox faith is at the core of the Russian world]. *Strategy of Russia*, 12 (December).

Being a supranationalism anchored in culture and religion, civilizationism can effectively ooze through Westphalian borders, potentially creating multiple frames of reference for individual loyalties and identities. It can articulate community across internationally recognized sovereignties. “We need,” argues the chair of a Russian parliamentary committee, “a professional approach to the Commonwealth of Independent States, above all to Ukraine and Belarus, based on the concept of ‘one people—different states [edinyi narod—raznyie gosudarstva],’ similar to what the Federal Republic of Germany had toward the German Democratic Republic.”¹⁰

Furthermore, drawing on historical arguments civilizationism can also construct itself depoliticizing alibis by placing membership in a civilizational community outside the scope of political decision-making. Thus, Nikonov, director of the Russian World Foundation, once said that he was troubled by the Ukrainian government’s declarations on its civilizational choice in favor of the EU:

I, as a historian, have always believed that civilizational choice was made for us by our ancestors. The civilizational choice is related *prima facie* to religious identity. And Grand Prince Vladimir made a civilizational choice through accepting Orthodoxy from Constantinople. To me, claims of contemporary politicians that they can make a civilizational choice seem like exaggerating strongly one’s role in history. Because a civilization is something that lasts for thousands of years.¹¹

Thus, culture and history, understood primordially, precede political choices. Consequently, the “target audience” of cultural-civilizational

¹⁰ Fedorov, Evgeny. 2008. Prodolzhim ukrepyat’ suverenitet [We will continue strengthening our sovereignty]. *Strategy of Russia* 8 (August).

¹¹ Viacheslav Nikonov at a joint RWF-CSCP session. CSKP: Stenogramma sovmestnogo zasedaniya CSKP i Fonda “Russkiy mir” na temu “Gosudarstvennyy yazyk i kul’turnoye mnogoobraziye Rossii” [CSPC: Transcript of a joint CSPC and Russkiy Mir Foundation session on “State language and cultural diversity of Russia”]. CSPC, February 21, 2012. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11461/>. Accessed January 10, 2015.

regionalism are not only, and usually not so much, the political elites as it is the broader society. If compared to the primarily intergovernmental forms of regionalism such as Eurasian economic integration, the "Russian world" discourse has a broader humanitarian underpinning. Its gaze is focused on populations rather than institutions. It constructs its members as individuals partaking in a cultural, spiritual and historical community. This dimension of civilizationism acquires its contextual relevance with respect to the second line of fragmentation in post-Soviet Russian identity. Borders have been ambiguous not only in terms of geographical space but also in terms of populations inhabiting them. In many cases, rapid shifts in spatial boundaries made distinctions between insiders/outside, oftentimes problematic with large numbers of formal outsiders being recognized as exhibiting various degrees of kinship. Thus, according to Tolz (2001, pp. 237–238) post-Soviet debates on national identity in Russia multiple competing definitions of Russianness. Several of these encompassed communities beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, including those of: 1) the "union identity," defining Russians an "imperial people" forming a "supranational state"; 2) "Russians as a nation of all Eastern Slavs, united by a common origin and culture"; 3) "the Russians as a community of Russian speakers, regardless of their ethnic origins." These multiple definitions are indicative of the humanitarian line of fragmentation in Russia's post-Soviet identity.

The humanitarian fragmentation line: A "divided people"

There are multiple, partially overlapping and partially competing, approaches to defining membership in the Russian nation, but they all identify various large groups of outsider populations as kin. In this regard, there are several important tropes to be discovered in Russian discourse which point to an experience of *humanitarian* or *societal fragmentation*. Exemplary in this respect are the discursive constructs of "divided people" or "divided nation." Just like "historical Russia," this notion surfaced in Putin's Crimea speech: "Millions of Russians went to sleep in one country and woke up in foreign land. Overnight they became national minorities in the former union republics. The Russian

people became one of the largest if, not the largest, divided people in the world.”¹²

Also just like “historical Russia,” the notion had crystallized in Russian political discourses well in advance. Following the disintegration of the USSR the ruling liberal reformers tried to ignore the so-called Russian “beached diaspora” (Laitin 1998) in the near-abroad. The political bet was originally placed on the civic nation model, built around the new state of the Russian Federation. They were, however, pressed into reconsidering their approach by the rise of a nationalist opposition (Parland 2005, p. 157; Tolz 2001, pp. 252–257). Consequently,

in the discourse of Russian politicians, Russian speakers in the newly independent states started to be presented as an integral part of the Russian nation. In official speeches and various government resolutions they began to be described as the *rossiiskaia diaspora*, for whom the RF was the homeland [*rodina*]. This definition of the Russian nation as all citizens of the RF plus the communities of Russian speakers abroad seems to have had the greatest impact on the policies and official pronouncements of the Russian government in 1994. In his New Year Address to the nation that year, Yeltsin specifically appealed to Russian speakers in the near abroad by saying, “Dear compatriots [*sootchestvenniki*]! You are inseparable from us and we are inseparable from you. We were and we will be together.” A similar statement was repeated by Yeltsin later that year in his annual address to the parliament. (Tolz 2001, pp. 253–254)

The notion of a “divided people” subsequently establishes itself across the discourses of various political actors and organizations. Thus, the trope is reproduced by multiple organizations dealing with the issues of the Russian diaspora (Laruelle 2006, p. 204). Likewise, the Communist Party includes it in its program.¹³ The self-narration of the World

¹² Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Address of the President of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia. March 18, 2014. <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/20603>. Page accessed December 10, 2014.

¹³ “In the years of restoration of capitalism the Russian question has become most acute. Today the Russians have become the largest divided people on the planet. There is an open genocide going on against a great nation. The

Russian People's Council, patronized from its very beginning in 1993 by the now head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill, is also built around this notion:

The World Russian People's Council was born in a difficult period of national history, when the Russian people were in desperate need of unification. For many long centuries the Russians lived on the territory of one country, were united by a common statehood and shared spiritual values. Starting from 1991 the Russians became a divided people, as the Council stated directly in one of its first declarations.¹⁴

Though the post-Soviet "beached diaspora" certainly plays a major role in the proliferation of the "divided people" trope, the notion is not always limited to one set of historical circumstances. Valeri Tishkov, director of the Institute for Anthropology and Ethnology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a frequent commentator on the "Russian world" idea, examines the sequence of the historical waves of emigration from Russia and concludes that the historical baseline for the Russian diaspora abroad was created by the events of the 1917 revolution and the subsequent political emigration. The exodus of large groups of Russians possessing significant cultural capital constituted, for the first time, the diaspora as a political phenomenon, thus giving birth to the Russian world. These political emigrants had a much sharper sense of identity, as compared to the earlier, lower-class labor migrants. They were capable of producing a cultural alternative to the Soviet regime—an alternative that Russian society embraced after the fall of Communism.¹⁵

number of Russians is decreasing. The historically formed language and culture are being destroyed. Resolving the Russian question and the struggle for socialism are two tasks that are, in essence, the same". *Programma Kommunisticheskoy Partii Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Program of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation] (2008). <http://kprf.ru/party/program>. Accessed January 15, 2015.

¹⁴ Vsemirny Russkiy Narodny Sobor. O sobore [World Russian People's Council. About the Council]. World Russian People's Council. http://www.vrns.ru/o_sobore/. Accessed January 1, 2015.

¹⁵ Tishkov, Valery. 2007. *Russkiy mir: smysl i strategii* [The Russian World: meaning and strategies]. *Strategy of Russia* 7 (July).

The understanding of diasporas as political phenomena, thus, brings into focus not only spatial divisions, but also ideological cleavages associated with the specifically difficult stages in Russian history. Consequently, the discourse on “divided people” can overlap with images of critical moments of historical ruptures. The societal division can, therefore, have not only geospatial but ideological or spiritual dimension.

The historical fragmentation line: Beyond “red” and “white”

For post-Soviet Russian identity, the ideological dimension associated with historical ruptures between different versions of Russian statehood creates another line of fragmentation which I dub *historical*. The specific challenge here is suturing (or “reconciling”) different historical periods that are dominated by sharply conflicting ideologies, narratives and attitudes. Thus, the imperial, the Soviet and the post-Soviet transition periods are separated by historical ruptures that set them respectively at odds with each other.

Cleavages that disrupt historical continuity can be relived as societal ones: this is where the lines of fragmentation can intersect:

The root of our problems lies in the fact that after 1917 we are living as a divided nation. [They] divided us, first into the “whites” and the “reds,” then into Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians proper. We are making a grave mistake when we speak of “brotherly” peoples of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia [bratskiye narody Ukrainy, Belorussii i Rossii]. We are one family: there are Great Russians [velikorossy], there are West Russians [zapadno-russkiye], there are South Russians [yuzhno-russkiye] and there are Russians living abroad. These are people who not only speak the Russian language, but live the spiritual life of a Russian man. There is the Russian nation, there is Russian civilization, to which this large notion of the Russian world belongs.¹⁶

¹⁶ The words belong to Valerii Bogomolov, a prominent functionary in Putin’s ruling United Russia Party and a State Duma member. Cited in Po razlomam istorii [At the fault lines of history]. *Strategy of Russia* 10 (October 2010).

Societal ruptures (such as “reds” vs. “whites”), thus, often overlap with ruptures in ideological foundations of state-building projects. In the Soviet Union the political order of the Russian Empire was generally denounced, though a great deal of Russian imperial nationalism was eventually recycled by the Communist regime. Similarly, the Soviet era served as a negative Other for post-Soviet Russian statehood during its early years. The Russian Federation was, in the words of Stanislav Belkovskiy, an “anti-Soviet country”¹⁷ in several key aspects. At least, it was such at its foundations.

Thus, the condemnation of the Soviet ideology and political practice became the “orthodoxy” (Parland 2005, p. 56). “The strong drive against communism in 1991–93 was marked by the radical reformers’ desire to cut off all the ties to the Soviet past and do away with Bolshevism once and for all. The Soviet period was repudiated and considered a parenthesis in Russia’s history. This new political intolerance was sometimes labeled ‘neo-Bolshevism’ as repeating the Bolsheviks’ attitude towards political adversaries” (ibid.).

Consequently, the new hegemonic language of liberal democracy and market economy hinged on a negative othering of the Soviet project. Furthermore, the legal and territorial foundations of post-Soviet Russian statehood were also in their own way “anti-Soviet.” The “script of sovereignty” that the Russian reformers pursued in their state-building project altogether negated the USSR as an empire that was mutually exclusive with Russian nation building. As McFaul notes,

[I]n December 1991, Russia allegedly reacquired its sovereignty from the Soviet Union, a sovereignty that the new leaders of the Russian state claimed had been lost for almost seventy years. Compared to other transfers of sovereignty in the twentieth century, however, it was a strange event. Like dramatic moments in the history of decolonization in Africa and Asia, this transfer of sovereignty from colonizer to colonized was punctuated with the lowering of the Soviet red hammer and sickle and raising of the

¹⁷ Ekho Moskvyy: Osoboye Mneniye: Stanislav Belkovsky [Echo of Moscow: Dissenting opinion: Stanislav Belkovsky]. Echo of Moscow, February 13, 2015 <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/1492008-echo/>. Accessed February 13, 2015.

Russian tricolor. Yet the flag ceremony did not take place on the periphery of a former empire; it was held in the capital city of the metropole itself. For Russia to become a sovereign state, the entire empire had to be destroyed. (McFaul 2001, p. 194)

The post-Soviet reform project, however, was challenged relatively quickly by the shocks of transition and numerous crises of a weakened Russian statehood. The reformist discourse was discredited virtually to the point that the word “democrat became a swearword” in Russia (Parland 2005, p. 43). Consequently, the rupture between the Soviet and the post-Soviet periods in Russian history persisted and was translated into political cleavages.¹⁸

The ruling class began undertaking attempts to suture across this line of fragmentation at a relatively early stage. As Parland writes, in 1994–1995 the political tide in Russia had already turned against Westernizer liberals and President Yeltsin reacted to the changing ideological climate by using the Great Patriotic War as a myth of national reconciliation. The Great Patriotic War was a common ground for both the “reds” and the “whites.” The authorities, therefore, focused on the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the victory, glorifying the role of the Red Army as well as the Russian Orthodox Church (Parland 2005, p. 59).

Thus, the Great Patriotic War was selected as a unifying theme when shared narratives were in short supply in post-Soviet Russia. Notably, recycling the Brezhnevite cult of the Great Patriotic War, the post-Soviet elites added some new elements such as the Orthodox Church—a theme silenced by the Soviet ideological practice. The importance of World War II and more generally “patriotic war” as a myth for forging unity only increased as practices of suturing Russia’s identity across the multiple lines of fragmentation were taken further under Putin.

¹⁸ The well-known juxtaposition of “liberals” and “patriots” in Russian political discourse is illustrative of the depth of these cleavages. If the “liberals,” who are largely associated with a Westernizing agenda, are set up against the “patriots,” it implies that the “liberals” are not just a particular political ideology or camp, but that they are somehow antipatriotic, negating Russia as such. The struggle of political ideologies thus has an inherently identitary dimension, and there is, once again, a lack of basic consensus on issues of national identity.

In relying on the myth of the "patriotic war" the Russian establishment invoked the nationalist mythological archetype which is nowadays most commonly invoked in the context of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) but has much deeper roots in Russian history. In fact, it can be seen as a basic morphological element of Russian historical narration, a recurrent narrative that reproduces the same structure or plot vested in different historical garments. Taken as a mythological archetype, patriotic war signifies a period of profound crisis and existential threat where the very survival of the Russian nation is put at stake by a hostile invasion, a deep territorial penetration, traditionally arriving from the West. National survival can no longer be exclusively secured through conventional instruments of war making at the disposal of the state apparatus. In fact, the state itself can be either temporarily dysfunctional or simply insufficient on its own to perform the heroic larger-than-life deed of national salvation. National survival then requires total mobilization and total unity of the Russian nation to mount a popular war to fight and repulse the invader.

Paradigmatic in this respect is the Russian historical narrative on the seventeenth-century Time of Troubles (*Smutoynoye vremya*) and the role of the popular home guard (*narodnoye opolcheni'e*) in delivering Russia from the Polish invasion. The Time of Troubles refers to a period of power vacuum and political turmoil in the Duchy of Moscow, that was created by the transition from the Rurik dynasty, that became extinct with the death of Ivan the Terrible's son Feodor II (1598) and lasted until the establishment of the Romanov dynasty that reconsolidated Muscovite statehood.

Russian historical narratives on the Time of Troubles typically juxtapose the degenerate political order represented by self-interested feudal lords to the altruistic effort of the "people" that take up arms and banish the foreign invader. The people here is understood holistically, as forming an organic unity, thus becoming, in effect, a Russian romantic nationalist myth. This myth also has a metahistorical nature. The story of popular warfare that repels a foreign invasion is told in relation to the Patriotic War of 1812 (Napoleon's invasion of Russia) and consequently the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 that starts with the German invasion. A "patriotic war" thus means one in defense of the Fatherland. It is a war that involves an existential threat to the Fatherland and, thus, requires utmost national mobilization and

national unity. The imperative is therefore to lay the internal disputes aside and to forget the social, political and ideological cleavages.

The patriotic war narrative thus has a depoliticizing effect. It is not difficult to see that it dovetails well with the depoliticizing effect of a civilization, as discussed in the previous chapter. Civilization celebrates unity and historical continuity across political and ideological cleavages, and so does the idea of a patriotic war. In the patriotic war, national unity is discovered in existential moments at a deeper, prepolitical level, when the conventional political order has all but disintegrated. Both the “civilization” and the “patriotic war” are versions of the romantic nationalist myth on the nation as an entity characterized by organic unity.

From that point of view, it is unsurprising that the rise of the civilizational discourse in Russia overlaps with the increased role that the “patriotic war” myth plays in forging national identity. In 2005 Russian authorities introduced¹⁹ a new national holiday on November 4. The Day of National Unity commemorated the anniversary of liberating Moscow from the “Polish–Lithuanian intervention” during the Time of Troubles in 1612. Few, however, failed to notice that the holiday seemed to fill in for the abolished November 7, the anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The date naturally continued to cause controversy in post-Soviet Russian society. The new construct of “national unity” was thus meant to overcome the persisting political cleavages, the old division between the “reds” and the “whites,” and to replace them with a holistic vision of the Russian nation that reached its organic unity when threatened by the invasion of a foreign Other.

In sum, it is plausible to argue that the discourse of a Russian “civilization” and the myth of a popular warfare embedded in the official cults of the Time of Troubles and the Great Patriotic War are mutually reinforcing because they themselves reinforce a romantic nationalist notion of the Russian society as possessing both an organic unity

¹⁹ Federal’ny zakon ‘O vnesenii izmeneniy v stat’yu 112 Trudovogo kodeksa Rossiyskoy Federatsii’ [Federal Law on Introducing Amendments to Article 112 of the Labor Code of the Russian Federation]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 31, 2004. <http://www.rg.ru/2004/12/31/zakon-prazdniki.html>. Accessed January 10, 2015.

and a distinct quality that distinguishes it from foreign others. The next section provides additional insights on the nexus between these two narratives.

The ethnocultural fragmentation line: A “universal sympathy”

Alongside civilization, war remained an important trope in official Russian discourses. Putin’s rise to power was strongly associated with perceptions of the war in Chechnya. The pacification of Chechnya was originally Putin’s primary source of political capital. Consequently, as many have acknowledged, the political mythology of President Putin as the savior of Russia was constructed against a perceived existential threat to Russia’s very integrity. As Taylor, argues

the North Caucasus, more than any other region in Russia, has been closest to what Guillermo O’Donnell calls a “brown area,” where the state not only does not function properly but is largely absent. Beyond the issues of state capacity and state quality, in the North Caucasus, post-Soviet Russia has faced a threat to state integrity, in which the soundness of its external borders was potentially at risk. Vladimir Putin’s meteoric rise to power was closely tied to the conflict in the North Caucasus. In some ways, a Putin presidency is unthinkable if not for the resumption of war between Russia and Chechnya in 1999. When he declared in early 2000 that resolving the situation in the region was his “historic mission,” he also stated that when he was named prime minister in August 1999, he figured that he only had a few months to “bang away at these bandits,” but that he was willing to sacrifice his political career to “stop the collapse of the country.” As we now know, banging away at the bandits made his career. (Taylor 2011, p. 250)

Unlike the spatial and societal fragmentation in Russia’s identity, which related to the loss of adjacent imperial territories and kin populations, the Chechen case was a major episode of *fragmentation along ethnocultural lines*. If external “compatriots” were detected as kin by Russian

political discourse, the Chechens, despite being on the inside of the newly drawn borders, had an established role of cultural Other in the Russian tradition. Russia's post-Soviet nation-building experience was, thus, strongly shaped not only by "territorial amputation" (Holmes 2006, p. 209) but also by the challenges of keeping the multinational state together. The specters of separatism haunted the post-Soviet Russian ruling class ever since Yeltsin's indulging attitude increased the power of regional elites and endowed some of the Russian Federation's autonomous republics with attributes of national sovereignty, such as, for example, local presidency (Petrov and Slider 2010, p. 59, pp. 61–62). As we well know, the multiple weaknesses produced by Yeltsin's statebuilding were addressed by Putin in his own specific manner, through recentralization (see Colton and Holmes 2006; Taylor 2011; Wegren and Herspring 2010).

Nevertheless, the "pacification" of Chechnya and the bringing of regional elites under Moscow's thumb in the early period of Putin's rule could not altogether banish the specter of societal disintegration along ethnocultural lines. Russian federalism, or rather that which was practiced under this ideological label, remained inherently problematic and, as subsequent events demonstrated, not always equal to the task of reconciling a *de facto* multicultural society. Thus, ethnonationalism erupted in massive antimigrant protests at Manezhnaya Square in Moscow in 2010, sparked by the death of Egor Sviridov, a soccer club supporter who confronted a group of North Caucasus natives. As Foxall observes in his study of ethnic relations in Russia, in recent years the country suffered from a large number of ethnic clashes in its major cities as well as in the rural peripheries (Foxall 2014).

For suturing across the ethnonational lines of fragmentation the Russian ruling class once again reverted to the notion of Russian civilization. In 2012 Putin published an article under the title "Russia: the national question."²⁰ Part of Putin's election campaign, this publication was directly responsive to the increased ethnic tensions. The article argued that the practices of European multiculturalism had failed and that the nation-state as such was going through a deep crisis. As com-

²⁰ Putin, Vladimir. 2012. Rossiya: natsional'ny vopros [Russia: the national question]. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 23. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html. Accessed December 15, 2014.

pared to Europe, however, Russia was allegedly in a different situation: "Our own national and migration problems are directly related to the destruction of the USSR, or, in essence, the historical greater Russia that took shape, in its basic form, already in the eighteenth century." "As the country disintegrated," the article continued, "we were at the edge, and—in certain regions we know—beyond the edge of a civil war, and this war was waged on the ethnic basis. It took us tremendous effort and many victims to extinguish these hotbeds. But that, of course, does not mean that the problem is solved."

The article, thus, explicitly related the ethnic tensions to the broader context of Russia's post-Soviet statehood crisis and fragmentation. Yet, continued the article, "even when the state as an institution became critically weak, Russia did not disappear. What happened was the same thing that Vasilii Kliuchevski described with regard to the first Russian Time of Troubles: "When the political ties [politicheskkiye skrepy] of the social order fractured, the moral will [nравstvennaya volya] rescued the country."

Citing the seventeenth-century events of the so-called Time of Troubles is no accident here. It refers to a key historical narrative, reproduced in the context of a new national holiday, the People's Unity Day. The two became important focal points for identity-building practices under Putin, and they also relate closely to the idea of a Russian civilization.

"By the way," continued Putin's article, "our holiday on November 4, People's Unity Day, which some superficially call 'Victory Day over the Poles,' is actually a 'victory day over ourselves,' over internal animosities and discords, when the estates and the nationalities [narodnosti] realized they were one community, one people. We have all right to consider this holiday the birthday of our civic nation."

Fragmentation across ethnonational lines is, thus, placed in the context of an apocalyptic narrative of disintegration. Note that Putin also speaks of the foreign intervention into the Duchy of Moscow as the *first* Time of Troubles, suggesting that it is more than a singular event, but rather a relapsing archetype.²¹ Thus, the article directly compares

²¹ It is not uncommon for some discourses to also portray Russia's post-Soviet 1990s as another Time of Troubles.

the seventeenth-century events with Russia's statehood crisis at the end of the twentieth century. The theme of disintegration and reintegration, therefore, becomes recurrent.

Ideologically, the concept of a "civic nation" that Putin brings up as a solution to ethnocultural fragmentation dovetails with the doctrine of a multinational Russian federalism. But the article goes much further than that in its suturing strategy. In the following paragraph "historical Russia" is proclaimed to be "not an ethnic state and not an American 'melting pot,'" but an entity that emerged and developed throughout centuries as a multinational state-building project springing across continents: "Developing [osvoyeniye] the vast lands that dominates Russia's history was a common cause of many peoples. Suffice to say that ethnic Ukrainians live in the space [stretching] from the Carpathians to Kamchatka. As do ethnic Tartars, Jews, Belarusians."

Further along the categories of *state* and *civilization* are used interchangeably or together, to suggest that Russians have a historical mission of sustaining cultural pluralism: "The pivot, the fastening fabric of this unique civilization—the Russian people, the Russian culture. It is this pivot that all sorts of provocateurs and our enemies will do everything to pull out—accompanied by talks, phony through and through, about the right of Russians to self-determination, about 'racial purity', about the necessity to 'finish what was started in 1991 and to destroy completely the empire parasitizing on the Russian people."

Putin's concern with ethnocultural fragmentation is responsive to a particular social context, namely the articulations of a new form of Russian nationalism. The rise of this nationalism accompanied the growing antimigrant sentiment, as the image of migrants began to be socially constructed as an image of the enemy—a place that had been traditionally reserved for the "West" (Laruelle 2010, p. 22). Popescu in his analysis calls this nationalism "isolationist" or "defensive" as opposed to the more conventional imperial "expansionist nationalism." "This strain of nationalism is focused more on maintaining Russia's 'Russianness' than on territorial expansion. The key source of defensive nationalism is the toxic mix of high immigration into Russia coupled with a demographic crisis among native-born ethnic Russians" (Popescu 2012, p. 47). Russian defensive nationalism—though "not being entirely postimperial"—has advocated the unloading of the burden of culturally alien territories.

Notably, the concern with the ethnocultural line of fragmentation is also intermingled with vague images of an external Other, an alleged "enemy" who is prepared to make it his instrument of mischief. Putin's article responds to manifestations of "defensive nationalism" by postulating *civilizationism* as the only feasible basis of Russian identity:

As to the much-talked-about national self-determination, that became an object of speculation at the hands of politicians who struggled for power and geopolitical dividends and who belonged to all possible camps—from Vladimir Lenin to Woodrow Wilson, [as to self-determination]—the Russian people long ago achieved self-determination. The self-determination of the Russian people is a polyethnic civilization, bound together by the Russian cultural nucleus. And the Russian people confirmed this choice time and again, and not during plebiscites and referenda, but with blood. With all its millennial history.

Civilizationism is, thus, articulated as an inherently complex ambiguous or *polysemic* construct that combines notions of homogeneity such as "cultural nucleus" with a universalist doctrine of cultural pluralism. The Russian people are portrayed as its unifying agent who is out on a millenary mission:

The Russian people are a state-forming people [gosudarstvoo-brazuyushiy narod]—which follows already from the very fact of Russia's existence. The great mission of the Russians is to unify, to tie together the civilization [skrepyat' civilizaciyu]. To tie it together with language, culture, with "universal sympathy" [vsemirnaya otzyvchivost] in the words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, to tie together Russian Armenians, Russian Azeris, Russian Germans, Russian Tartars. To tie them together into such a type of a civilization-state [gosudarstvo-civilizaciya], where there are no "national minorities [nacmeny]" [a pejorative term during the Soviet era—A.K.], and where the principle of distinguishing "friend from foe" [svoiy-chuzhoy] is determined by common culture and common values.

Such civilizational identity [civilizacionnaya identichnost] is based on preserving the Russian cultural dominant, whose bearers are

not only ethnic Russians, but all bearers of such identity regardless of nationality. This is the cultural code [kulturnyi kod], that was put to serious test in the recent years, that [they] were and are trying to break into. And, nevertheless, it has preserved itself. But we need to nurture it, strengthen it and take care of it.

Putin's article, thus, presents an exercise in identity politics that uses civilizationism to suture across the existing ethnocultural lines of fragmentation. The article occasionally links the threat of domestic cultural conflict to an unspecified, anonymous Other. The Russian civilization state is also constructed as a polysemic notion where at least two aspects can be analytically isolated: the homogenous notion of a "Russian cultural core" and a form of cultural pluralism, or universalism that at the same time borders on a hegemonic supranationalism (as evident from the multiplicity of proposed hybrid identities such as "Russian Armenians" or "Russian Azeris"). The article is responsive to a particular context of articulation, namely the growth of ethno-nationalism that challenges the official supranationalist federalism. At the same time, it places the theme of ethnic symphony in the broader context of national unity, supported by meta-historical narratives such as the narrative on the Time of Troubles.

Arguably then, the ethnocultural *line* of fragmentation belongs together with the spatial, the historical and the societal fragmentation lines, all of them being somehow sutured by civilizational discourse. In turn, addressing these identitary fragmentations through the discursive construct of civilization becomes possible in virtue of its polysemy. Here one aspect of polysemy is the ability to combine culturally pluralist hegemonic supranationalism with the kind of cultural essentialism that is exposed, for example, in Putin's idea of a "cultural core" with a "millennial" historical dimension.

As the analysis demonstrated, however, the potential of the term for polysemy is not exhausted by discursive suturing of ethnocultural fragmentation. Polysemy also abounds in its ability to address the spatial, temporal and societal dimensions. Russian civilization is thus a broad frame for identity production around which a number of overlapping but analytically distinguishable discourses are organized. These discourses touch upon separate agendas and policy areas but share a concern with fragmentation albeit along their specific lines. They can

therefore be seen as part of the larger task of reconstituting Russia's post-Soviet identity for which the construct of civilization serves as a sort of conceptual meta-instrument.

The Russian civilization and the domestic/international nexus

The main focus of this study is the nexus between regionalism and identity. I treat the discourses of Russian civilization as a particular form of *cultural* regionalism, as it is a discourse which constructs a regional spatiality through notions of cultural distinctness. On the other hand, the discourse of civilization is an identity-building project which makes this cultural regionalism an identitary enterprise. In the discourses of Russian civilization we are thus dealing with a particular nexus of the domestic and the international. The social construction of space around Russia and the suturing of the fragmented identity are happening simultaneously, they are one and the same process. The polysemy of "civilization" sutures it across the many ruptures, but, at the same time, it constructs multiple entities that transcend the internationally established borders of the present-day Russian Federation. Territorial fragmentation is sutured so as to include territories of other states into the "greater" or "historical" Russia. Humanitarian fragmentation is sutured across to produce notions of the "Russian world" which is again larger than the population of the Russian Federation. Suturing the historical fragmentation allows the rehabilitation of the Soviet past without bringing back the Communist ideology. Consequently, reconciling post-Soviet Russia with its previous period of history naturally reinforces perceptions of the present-day Russia as incomplete, traumatized and fragmented by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the collapse itself being an event which President Putin believes to be the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century." Such perceptions, in turn, reinforce the feeling of territorial and humanitarian fragmentation, as integrity is projected into the idealized Soviet past.

The ethnocultural line of fragmentation persists as defining Russia as a nation-state continues to run into problems. The failure of federalism *à la russe* to reconcile cultural differences produces the

temptation to revert to an alternative identity of a “civilization-state.” From that point of view Russia seems too diverse to be a conventional nation-state and is bound to remain a culturally pluralistic “civilization” with a Russian “cultural core.” However, the “civilization-state” model also leads to further temptations. If the Russian “civilization-state” can accommodate difference inside the borders of the Russian Federation, then it can also just as well be used to justify the inclusion of more difference from beyond. If Russia is bound to remain a polyethnic “civilization” anyway, then, indeed, why stop at its present limits? The civilizational solution to domestic problems can be seen as a path dependence of sorts where the exceptional status of a “civilization-state” can make it a platform for new cycles of direct expansionism or indirect hegemony in the neighborhood.

Domestic issues in Russia thus tend to form a peculiar nexus with issues of foreign policy and international politics. And when it comes to the ideas on Russia as a civilization, national identity simultaneously also becomes an *international* one. This situation, of course, makes the Self/Other approach to analysis of identities particularly fruitful. The paramount role that the West continues to play in the constitution of the Russian identity is indispensable for understanding the structure of the civilizational discourse in Russia. The Western other is always its ultimate lynchpin. This in itself is no big news for students of Russian identity, but what this analysis brings forward is the role of polysemies. In particular, it highlights the way in which the official discourse of civilizationism combines that which at a glance may seem uncombinable. The discourse marries cultural pluralism, or to be more precise, culturally pluralist hegemonic supranationalism (the idea of a Russian “cultural core” around which the diversity made up of “Russian Germans” and “Russian Tartars” is organized) to a kind of cultural essentialism or even isolationism that securitizes foreign influence as potentially detrimental to the values allegedly espoused by the “cultural core.”

This ambiguous mixture of inclusivity and isolationism is also combined with ideas of a “civilizational status.” The civilizational status is a claim to an international stance that assumes both ontological independence from the West and a relation of parity, i.e., equal worth of the Russian and the Western civilizations. The next chapter continues to track the domestic/international nexus inherent in the Russian civilizationist discourse. It first demonstrates how the Western Other is

used in strands of discourse that aspire to construct a domestic political and normative order for Russia by citing its civilizational distinctness. These discourses can be identified as cultural conservative or even isolationist at some points. They typically end up advocating a version of *Sonderweg* for Russia and frown upon the intrusion of "Western" (i.e., liberal) norms into the declared authenticity of Russian civilization. Other discourses quote "Russian civilization" as proof of Russia's exceptionalism, of its global status vis-à-vis other civilizations, first and foremost, of course, vis-à-vis its perennial Western Other.

CHAPTER 5

Cultural Regionalism as a Non-Western Model of Global Order

This chapter addresses two closely related discursive tendencies in Russia. The first tendency is the shift toward a nativist or conservative discourse which is prone to revert to culturalist arguments. This discourse is closely linked with the idea of Russia as an independent civilization which is distinct from its Western Other. The second tendency is the projection of civilizational ideas into foreign policy discourses where civilizations become the cornerstone of proposed regional and global orders.

In *Russia and the Idea of Europe* Neumann speaks of a “lasting and crucial” nexus between the Romantic nationalism and Russian messianism. If Romantic nationalism in nineteenth-century Russia advocates the distinctness of a nation defined in cultural terms, the Russian “cultural trait,” then Russian messianism put forth a global, universalist mission such as saving Europe from what Russian philosophers call spiritual ossification (Neumann 1996, p. 21). In the nineteenth century, the natural political vessel for combining the two philosophies was the imperial order legitimized by religion. In today’s world, nineteenth-century-style empires have become anathema. However, as the analysis demonstrates, the two old patterns continue to cohabitate in the Russian official discourse. And “civilization” is convenient for accommodating them both precisely in virtue of its polysemy and ambiguity. I therefore treat as parts of the same process the rise of culturalist conservatism in definitions of the domestic political and normative project

and the civilizational projections into foreign policy discourses that aspire to construct regional and global orders. Unsurprisingly also, the lynchpin that holds the two discourses together is the Western Other.

The civilizational argument and the “conservative turn” in Russian politics

In the years the Russian ruling class had been putting increasingly high premium on culturally specific and culturally defined—as opposed to imported “Western”—values as the guideline to national development. In 2009 the ruling pro-presidential United Russia party proclaimed “Russian conservatism” as its official ideology. Chairman Boris Gryzlov described this ideology as based on preserving and developing Russia as a strong state, safeguarding history, culture and tradition. This ideology would allow Russia to develop, as he put it, “but not in any radical ways as some parties propose.” He added: “I find it particularly important that our ideology is not copied from foreign templates, but developed in [the context of] practical work, in accordance with Russia’s real interest.”¹

This “conservative” discourse was reproduced, in particular, inside the Center for Social and Conservative Policy and the National Institute for the Development of Contemporary Ideology (NIDCI), both of which were United Russia think tanks. Within this conservative discourse a particular relationship toward Russia’s European other was put forth. This relationship was carved along the lines of a counter-hegemonic partial identification with what Remizov (see Chapter 3) called “another Europe”:

I feel that Russia needs to declare itself, in a clearer and more distinct fashion, as “conservative Europe.” We are part of the European civilization, but we are the conservative part of the European civilization, as we were in the times of Stolypin and before Stolypin. [...] This includes also specific things, for

¹ Itogi politicheskogo sezona (osen’ 2009 – leto 2010) [Results of the political season (autumn 2009 – summer 2010)]. National Institute for the Development of Contemporary Ideology. http://www.nirsi.ru/PublicPolicy/n64/Itogi_politsezona_-_osen2009-leto2010.pdf/. Accessed January 7, 2015.

example, the role of religion in society. We see that in the European Union religion is being driven away, we are witnessing not only a persecution of Orthodoxy, but a persecution of Christianity as a whole in Europe, it is being forced out of public life. And we must preserve religion as a factor of our society, including education.²

So, when Dmitry Medvedev assumed the presidency in 2008, his “penchant for liberal rhetoric” (Kononenko 2011, p. 16) and his famous discourse on Russia’s direly needed “modernization” was actually paralleled by a partisan discourse on “*conservative* modernization,” which distanced itself from both Communist *and* liberal development models and appealed instead to a culturally defined tradition. Variations of this discourse also belonged to Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church, who stressed the key role of traditional values in modernization. Here is how a 2009 NIDCI policy paper explained “conservative modernization”:

First of all, the success or failure of a modernization depends on the extent to which modernization corresponds to the social and cultural features [sociokul’turnye osobennosti] of the country. Every nation should choose the path of development that best corresponds to its traditions. But this does not equal cultural isolationism. A synthesis is necessary between tradition and modernity.³

² Voiced by Sergei Markov, a member of State Duma for United Russia, policy expert, and member of Russia’s Public Chamber, during a 2012 discussion at CSCP. GPK: Stenogramma zasedaniya Gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskoy platformy VPP “Edinaya Rossiya” po teme: “Nam nuzhna Velikaya Rossiya!,” posvyashchennogo 150-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya P.A. Stolypina [GPK: Transcript of the State-Patriotic platform “United Russia” meeting entitled: “We need a Great Russia!,” dedicated to the 150th anniversary of P.A. Stolypin]. Center for Social Conservative Policy, April 16, 2012. <http://www.cscp.ru/discussions/10000202/11503/>. Accessed January 8, 2015.

³ Modernizatsiya Rossii: razvitiye na osnove traditsiy, materialy k zasedaniyu Gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskogo kluba partii “Edinaya Rossiya” [Modernization of Russia: development based on traditions, proceedings of the State-Patriotic Club of the “United Russia” party]. National Institute for the Development of Contemporary Ideology <http://www.nirsi.ru/55>. Accessed January 6, 2015.

The discourses of “conservatism” and “conservative modernization,” which developed at least partially as a response to Medvedev’s liberal “modernization” agenda, signaled that normative distancing from the Western liberal standards was gaining further momentum with the Russian establishment. Apparently, this distancing also began to increasingly rely on culturalist arguments. In 2007 Vladislav Surkov, godfather of the Russian “sovereign democracy” doctrine and the “gray eminence” behind the manipulative political technologies of “managed democracy,” published a “civilizational” justification of political differences.⁴ He portrayed Russian “political culture” as having “archetypical,” “unchangeable” features that included a “holistic” and “intuitivistic” perception of the world as predetermined by Russian “cultural consciousness.” In practice, this translated into a centralized and personalized organization of political power: “I believe,” wrote Surkov, “in our political culture that the person is the institution.” Differences between Russian and Western “political cultures” according to him were programmed.

Stories that the unprecedented pressure that Russia is experiencing today is caused by deficiencies of our democracy is rubbish and nonsense. It would be much cleverer to see other reasons behind these talks, such as control over Russia’s natural resources through the weakening of its state institutions, its defense potential and independence. But this would also be somewhat of a simplification. Here is what a contemporary researcher of identity issues, Iver Neumann writes: “[In all times] no matter which social practices a period has foregrounded, be they religious, bodily, intellectual, social, military, political, economic, or otherwise [for ourselves we should add—democratic], Russia has consistently been seen [by the West] as an irregularity.” And he adds: “Since exclusion is a necessary ingredient of integration the temptation remains, however, to play up the alterity of Russia in order to increase the integration of the European self.”⁵

⁴ Surkov, Vladislav. 2007. *Russkaya politicheskaya kul'tura* [The Russian political culture]. *Strategy of Russia* 7 (June).

⁵ I am giving the original citation from Neumann (1999, pp. 110–112) except for the text in brackets which belongs to Surkov.

Surkov's invocation of "holism" and "intuitivism" as specifically Russian cultural features is not too surprising. The ideas go back to the works of classical Russian religious philosophers like Losskiy and Solovyov, whom he does not cite. More striking is the combination of essentialist romantic ideas about holism as an "archetypical" feature with Neumann's deconstructivist approach to the Self/Other constitution. This odd marriage is hardly a sign of intellectual naïveté. Rather in Surkov the "DJ-ing creature" that Dugin speaks of (see Chapter 2) seems to have grown omnivorous to the point of digesting even post-structuralists.

Increasing culturally defined normative distance from the Western Other was thus one general ideological trend that reinforced the validity of civilizational vocabularies. In parallel to the development of nativist ideas grounded in concepts of a distinct civilization, romantic nationalist ideas were also invoked by the establishment in order to construct a narrative on societal integrity through the myth of national unity. The symbolism of unity associated with November 4 suggests that the holiday was an attempt to construct a new ideological axis of Russian statehood. The notion of "unity" have been covered multiple aspects—as emphasized by the accompanying narratives.⁶ Moreover, the holiday was also systematically tied to the powerful symbolism of "patriotic war." As I already pointed out, the patriotic war myth refers to a situation of an existential threat coming from a foreign Other who invades the domestic space of the Russian self. The "people" are epitomized by the popular *homeguard*, which functions as the major protagonist, defeating the foreign invasion and restoring the distorted unity of Russian civilization. The patriotic war is, thus, a romantic nationalist narrative of organic unity that the Russian people demonstrate in the face of an existential threat. The Day of National Unity anchors this narrative—as Putin himself suggested:

This is a new holiday, you are right. But the idea that it carries is extremely important. In the life of every people, in the life of every

⁶ Here I rely on analysis of several speeches by the president as well as other influential public figures, such as Patriarch Kirill. Many of them present interesting empirical evidence, but it is impossible to cite it in its entirety due to the limits of the present book.

state the work of monarchs and heads of states is of course important but, in the end, the last word belongs to the people. And the leaders are only efficient to the extent to which they can unite around their decisions the overwhelming majority of citizens or subjects. And only uniting around these common values, putting aside, for a time, tactical disagreements [...] one can be successful. It is well known that both individuals and states best demonstrate their potential in crisis situations. [...] And so it was when they threw the intervening forces out of the Kremlin. [...] And so it was when our people stood firm in the years of the Great Patriotic War; so it was when starting from 1945 the national economy destroyed by the invaders was being restored. So it was often in the history of Russia, our state, and in the history of other nations.⁷

The “patriotic war” functions as a transhistorical myth linking repeated historical instances of organic national unity in the face of a foreign threat. This threat is narrativized as existential. It is not only accompanied by deep territorial penetration, typically coming from the West, and promise of physical destruction. It is also a menace to Russia’s distinct civilizational identity (e.g., the threat of Catholicization coming from the Polish–Lithuanian intervention during the seventeenth-century Time of Troubles).

Consider these words spoken by head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill in 2012 at the opening of Sixteenth World Russian People’s Council dedicated to the “frontiers of Russia”:

For us who have gathered here the frontiers [rubezhi] of Russia are not only its geographical borders. Doubtless, the notion of frontiers is full of spiritual sense. No doubt it includes, first of all, moral borders, ethical borders, beyond which we cannot and must not retreat.

⁷ Putin on November 4, 2007, during a meeting with army cadets and representatives of Russian youth organizations. *Beseda s kursantami voennykh uchilishch i predstaviteliymi molodezhnykh organizatsiy* [A discussion with military cadets and representatives of youth organizations]. President of Russia, November 4, 2007. <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2007/11/150255.shtml>. Accessed January 2, 2015.

Let us remember the words uttered in the harsh days of 1941, when a deadly enemy stood at the gate of the capital: “Nowhere to retreat, Moscow lies behind us.” More than once in Russian history moments arose [...] when our ancestors had to speak these sacred words: “Nowhere to retreat, behind us lies our country, the Orthodox shrines, the heart of our civilization.” [...] Today when physical battles have been replaced by information warfare, when the struggle over the people’s souls comes to the forefront, we must not forget about the existence of the sacred frontiers that we hold we must hold as firmly as our forefathers. [...] This year [2012] Russia celebrates three memorable anniversaries. Firstly, it is 400 years since the intruders were ousted and the Time of Troubles ended—the doings that are today celebrated as the Day of National Unity. Secondly, two centuries ago came defeat of the invasion of a dozen of tongues [nashestviye dvunadesiati yazykov], a metaphor referring to the multinational, pan-European character of the invading army led by Napoleon Bonaparte. Finally, the coming November will see the seventieth anniversary of the Stalingrad offensive which became a turning point in the Great Patriotic War and, in general, in World War II. All these epochal events in 1612, 1812 and in 1942 are related to the most dramatic episodes in the relations between Russia and Western Europe. These were not only clashes of two armies. Every time on the field of battle [...] there took place a struggle of ideals in which people see the meaning of their lives [...].

The history of relations between Russia and the West is difficult and contradictory. It is impossible to fit into the Procrustean bed of simple formulas. [...] If we follow Nikolay Danilevsky, Arnold Toynbee, Samuel Huntington in acknowledging that humanity represents a sum of several cultural-historical types, several civilizational projects, then Russia and the West, should be considered the closest civilizations on Earth. [...] As a matter of fact, originally it was culturally multifaceted but in essence a common [edinaya] Christian civilization, whose ethical basis formed under the influence of the undivided Church. [...] The division of the Churches and the crusades to the East as well as the [Teutonic] Order’s invasions of northwestern Rus’ split the European civilization. Later, our ancestors had to stand up many times to

expansion, protecting their national existence, their culture and spiritual identity. [...] And the danger of these aggressions lay in the fact that the conquerors did not only need our lands and our wealth. They came for our souls.⁸

I quote these passages at length because they are exemplary. They demonstrate how the conservative discourse in Russia linked war—understood in the literal sense—to what it frames as normative war or war of values, threatening national integrity. The symbolism that is constructed in the Patriarch’s speech links the spatial borders to spiritual borders and equates present-day Western cultural influence with historical instances of territorial invasions that arrived from the West. In a way, this discursive construct that binds cultural influence and war parallels and anticipates the Russian narrative on “hybrid war” that also frames culture and information technologies as weapons.

The rise of civilizationism can thus be seen as both anticipated and reinforced by two important ideological tendencies whose origins can be traced back to the earlier years of Putin’s rule. First, there is the culturally defined normative distancing from “Europe” or the “West.” This distancing emphasizes difference, without at the same time breaking altogether away from the notion of a civilizational community with the Western Other. Notably, the Patriarch’s Council address (as well as many other of his public speeches) reproduce the same ambiguous identitary pattern as does the Russian conservative discourse, that is, partial identification with Europe. A second and related tendency that pertains to the discourse of civilizationism is the romantic-nationalist emphasis on national unity, in particular as articulated through the mythology of “patriotic war.” This transhistorical narrative with a Pythagorean charm to it (1612, 1812, 1942) involves the images of a nation rallying around common values and protecting its physical *and* axiological integrity from foreign invasion.

⁸ Vystupleniye Svyateyshego Patriarkha Moskovskovo i Vseya Rusi Kirilla na otkrytii XVI Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora [Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the opening of the XVI World Russian People’s Council]. World Russian People’s Council, December 10, 2012. http://www.vrns.ru/documents/69/897/#.VWoQ_c-qr18. Accessed December 29, 2015.

Civilization, spiritual sovereignty and the ambiguity of soft power

The growing Russian concern about preserving axiological integrity from alien influence is reflected by the emergence of a number of constructs such as “spiritual security [dukhovnaya bezopasnost],”⁹ “spiritual independence,”¹⁰ “spiritual sovereignty,”¹¹ or “humanitarian sovereignty [gumanitarnyi suverenitet].” These notions discursively often tie the agenda of civilizationally defined values to images of global geopolitical competition, such as in this statement of the World Russian People’s Council patronized by Patriarch Kirill:

The era in which we live becomes the time of a new confrontation between geopolitical centers, competing for influence, resources and market. As opposed to the twentieth century when the signs of such confrontation were military conflicts, in today’s world the factor of “soft power” plays a special role. Supremacy over enemies

⁹ “Today we are speaking also of spiritual security which the nucleus of informational security, and global insecurity for the future of our children—manipulation of consciousness and control of the thoughts of our children. Actually, there is a struggle of meanings [bor’ba smyslov] going on in the world” (Tatiana Zhukova, during a 2009 discussion at the Center for Social and Conservative Policy. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/10627/>. Accessed January 12, 2015; Zhukova was president of the Association of School Libraries of Russia). The concept of “spiritual security” seems to have also migrated to the academia. For example, in 2011 a doctoral dissertation was defended in Moscow under the title “Spiritual Security of the Russian Society in the Conditions of Contemporary Geopolitical Rivalry (a Social Philosophical Analysis)” (summary available from DissersCat, an electronic database of dissertations defended in Russia: <http://www.disserscat.com/content/dukhovnaya-bezopasnost-rossiiskogo-obshchestva-v-usloviyakh-sovremennogo-geopoliticheskogo-s>, accessed January 12, 2015).

¹⁰ Ganichev, Valeriy. 2013. Vopros dukhovnoy nezavisimosti [The issue of spiritual independence], *Strategy of Russia* 4, April. Ganichev was chairman of the Union of Writers of Russia and deputy head of World Russian People’s Council.

¹¹ Patriarch Kirill in 2013 address to the World Russian People’s Council. Notably, the construct first surfaced in the 2005 “Russian Doctrine” that the Patriarch subsequently endorsed (see above).

is secured by methods of informational, cultural and worldview pressure [mirovozzrencheskoye vozdeystviye]. [...] Russia's humanitarian sovereignty is its independence, its protection from the pressures of "soft power," that in the twenty-first century becomes the primary instrument of expansion for outside forces that aspire to world domination. This expansion bears threats and risks that need to be discussed separately. In the first place, it is the risk of eroding civilizational borders, loss of civilizational identity and, as consequence, inevitable incorporation into other civilizational systems as an externally controlled object. [...] Today, Russia is experiencing a powerful pressure of forces that are interested in destroying its humanitarian sovereignty and its civilizational reorientation [civilizacionnaya pereorientaciya]. The sacred dates of our history are becoming an object of information attacks.¹²

Preoccupation with integrity of values and "sacred" history and the securitization of alien "soft power" is not limited to the discourse of the Patriarch and the Council he patronizes, but represents a broader concern among the Russian ruling class and is reflected in more than one official document. Russia's 2009 national security strategy lists among negative influences on the state of national security "attempts to put to revision views on Russia's history, its role and place in world history."¹³ The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation stated that "global competition, for the first time in modern history, takes on a civilizational dimension, which implies competition between different value landmarks [cennostnye orientiry] and models of development within the limits of universal principles of democracy and market economy." Consequently, it further observed that "the reaction of the historical West to the prospect of losing its monopoly on global-

¹² Sobornoye slovo XVI Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora [Joint declaration of the Sixteenth World Russian People's Council]. World Russian People's Council, November 3, 2012. <http://www.vrns.ru/sobornost/599/#.VW6TKM-qr18>. Accessed January 3, 2015.

¹³ Strategiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020]. Security Council of the Russian Federation. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>. Accessed December 28, 2014.

ization processes often translates into inertia, a [persisting] political and psychological attitude to ‘deter’ Russia, including attempts at selective use of history, above all the history of World War II and the postwar period.”¹⁴ The updated 2013 Concept warns that the “increasing global competition” bore risks of “destructive and unlawful use of ‘soft power’ and human rights concepts with the purpose of exerting political pressure on sovereign states, intervening into and destabilizing domestic affairs and manipulating public opinion and consciousness, in particular as part of funding humanitarian projects.”¹⁵

The Foreign Policy Concept echoes Putin’s earlier reflections on soft power. In his 2012 campaign article he reflected on the Arab Spring as demonstrating that “the global public opinion in our days is formed through a most active usage of advanced information and communication technologies. One could say that the internet, social networks, mobile phones and so on have become—alongside television—an effective instrument of both domestic and foreign policy.” Consequently, Putin observed, the term “soft power” has been used more and more often meaning “achieving foreign policy goals without weapons but with informational and other tools of influence.” “Unfortunately,” he complained “often these methods are used to foster and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, to manipulate public consciousness.” Therefore, we need to “distinguish clearly freedom of speech and normal political activity from cases unlawful use of soft power.”¹⁶

Russian policy experts paralleled these master articulations by actively securitizing foreign “soft power.” Among them were experts from the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), a think tank

¹⁴ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia, July 15, 2008. <http://news.kremlin.ru/acts/785>. Accessed December 28, 2014.

¹⁵ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V. Putinym 12 Fevralya 2013 [Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation on February 12, 2013]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 18, 2013. http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F. Accessed December 28, 2014.

¹⁶ Vladimir Putin. Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir [Russia and the changing world]. *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, February 27, 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/02/27/putin-politika.html>. Accessed December 23, 2014.

that has reportedly provided policy advice on the near abroad to the presidential administration. In 2012 Vladimir Karyakin, a RISS senior research fellow and a candidate of science in military studies (*kandidat voennykh nauk*) prepared a report on “Russia as the target of international actors’ strategies of ‘indirect action’ and ‘soft power.’” A crucial element of these strategies, according to the report, is building a system of “external governance [*vneshnee upravlenie*]” and “transforming the political system of the victim country.” This implies “not only to the physical destruction of the very institute of statehood of the victim country, that leads to conquest of its territory and resources, but destruction of the original [*samobytnaya*] civilization of this country, i.e., changing the civilizational, confessional-cultural and national identification of its people.”¹⁷

This is not the only treatment that the soft power concept received in Russian expert discourse. Igor Yurgens of the liberal-minded Institute of Modern Development, for example, argues that in the past Russia has enjoyed enormous “soft power” as a “civilizational pole of attraction” due to its Pan-Slavist, Orthodox or Communist missions,¹⁸ but today its way to soft power lies through economic reform and democratization.¹⁹ Nevertheless, official readings of “soft power” tend to exhibit a strong tendency toward securitization. Ironically, strands of expert discourse interpret “soft power” as a weapon of new generation

¹⁷ Rossiya kak tsel’ realizatsii strategiy “nepryamykh deystviy” i “myagkoy sily” vneshnepoliticheskikh aktorov. Doklad vedushchego nauchnogo sotrudnika otdela oboronnoy politiki RISI Vladimira Karyakina [Russia as the target of international actors’ strategies of “indirect actions” and “soft power.” The report of a senior research fellow at the RISI department of defence policy Vladimir Karyakin]. Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, December 11, 2012. <http://riss.ru/analytics/2695/>. Accessed January 2, 2015.

¹⁸ Zhestkiy vyzov ‘myagkoy sily’. Igor Yurgens, predsedatel’ pravleniya Instituta sovremennogo razvitiya [The tough challenge of “soft power.” Igor Yurgens, Chairman of the Management Board of the Institute of Modern Development]. Institute of Modern Development, September 16, 2011. <http://www.insor-russia.ru/ru/news/analytics/9742>. Accessed January 2, 2015.

¹⁹ Analiticheskiy bulletin’, July 2012, 2. Igor Yurgens, Predsedatel’ Pravleniya Instituta sovremennogo razvitiya [Analytical Bulletin, July 2012, 2. Igor Yurgens, Chairman of the Institute of Modern Development]. Institute of Modern Development http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/INSOR_July_2.pdf. Accessed January 2, 2015.

that partially substitute for exercise of military power (cf. the clerical discourse on “information wars” as a new “patriotic war”). Reception of this concept by Russian experts with military or security background has made it part of a discourse on the new, hybridized mode of warfare. In this mode borders between the states of peace and war are being “erased” and nonmilitary “economic, informational, humanitarian, and other means” play an important role.²⁰

The imported concept has, thus, received quite a peculiar treatment in Russian policy discourses. As the author of the concept himself argued when explaining “what China and Russia don’t get about soft power,” developing soft power “need not be a zero-sum game. All countries can gain from finding each other attractive” (Nye 2013).

But this is exactly the kind of reading that “soft power” receives in Russia. It is securitized and constructed as an instrument in the ongoing zero-sum game of global competition²¹ that, according to the Foreign Policy Concept, also takes on a “civilizational dimension.”

This Russian adventure of Nye’s concept is an important indicator. The discursive nexus between “soft power” and “civilization” is rooted in the polysemy of the term. As I already pointed out, polysemy is what creates the effect of the “common nouns” (Bourdieu 1991)—or “nodal points” in Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) terminology—notions that are both shared and contested. Polysemy makes “civilization” a convenient

²⁰ Valeriy Gerasimov. Tsennost’ nauki v predvidenii [The value of science is in the foresight]. *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur’er*. Published in the 27 February 2013 issue 8 (476). <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>. Accessed January 2, 2015. Valeriy Gerasimov was Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces in 2013.

²¹ An example of zero-sum game reading from Tamara Guzenkova, deputy director of RISS, who suggests that Western “soft power” tools cannot contribute to Eurasian integration as it is mutually exclusive with Westernization: “Does one need to be a rocket scientist to understand the obvious? Foreign NGOs have come to Russia and the CIS countries to assist their convergence with the Western world. And their potential is not at all directed at assisting the unification of post-Soviet Eurasia.” Tamara Guzenkova. *Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soyuz: grazhdanskoye izmereniye* [Eurasian Economic Union: civil dimension]. Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, June 6, 2012. http://riss.ru/images/pdf/journal/2012/6/08_%D0%93%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0.pdf. Accessed January 2, 2015.

conceptual frame for identity production, as it enables harboring several aspects of unity, namely the temporal, the spatial, the societal and the ethnonational. And consequently, this polysemy allows the combination of what one would think uncombinable: a romantic-nationalist form of cultural essentialism that appeals to a homogenous culture and primordial “values” with ideological ambitions for a heterogeneous, culturally pluralist supranationalism or universalism. These universalist ambitions also correlate closely with the quest for a global mission and status.

Accordingly, the Russian treatment of “soft power” belongs to both realms. When securitized as an instrument of cultural wars, it reveals one aspect of its ambiguous reading, i.e., the imperative of protecting the threatened cultural unity. This corresponds to those tendencies in Russian identity-building practices that include culturally defined normative distancing from the West, an increased premium on culturally defined axiological integrity and affirmations of “spiritual independence” and “spiritual security.”

But the treatment of “soft power” in Russian discourses is ambiguous. Returning to Putin’s take on it, one can also see him acknowledging it as an accepted global practice:

In today’s world there are many “agents of influence.” When they work openly—this is just one of the forms of civilized lobbying. Russia also has such institutions, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian World Foundation, our leading universities that seek out talented applicants abroad. But Russia does not use the national NGOs of other countries, does not fund these NGOs and foreign political organizations in order to advance its interests. Nor do China, India, or Brazil act this way.²²

The other reading given to “soft power” in Russian discourses is, thus, an attribute of international influence and status, a confirmation of being, according to Yurgens, a “civilizational pole of attraction.”²³ This

²² Putin, Vladimir. 2012. Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir [Russia and the changing world]. *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, February 27. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/02/27/putin-politika.html>. Accessed December 23, 2014.

²³ Zhestkiy vyzov ‘myagkoy sily’. Igor Yurgens, predsedatel’ pravleniya Instituta sovremennogo razvitiya [The tough challenge of ‘soft power’. Igor Yurgens,

is also how the concept becomes institutionalized and translated into Russia's own "soft power" practices of constructing supranational and transnational communities. These practices are anchored in the frame of "Russian civilization" or "Russian world," and draw on cultural elements that are allegedly derived from Russia's unique "civilizational identity." These practices strive toward a regional or global outreach, but, on the other hand, they are strongly influenced by zero-sum game assumptions. As some argue, they are also limited in terms of target audience by their culturalist focus, the Russian language being no match to English in terms of its global impact.

A "Russian world": Soft power, region building, and public diplomacy

Arguably, the combination of coveting and suspicion in the Russian attitude toward Western "soft power" demonstrates simultaneous rejection of and normative, conceptual dependence on the Western Other. This ambiguous situation fits very well into the pattern of partial, counterhegemonic identifications that we are tracing. This is how the Russian establishment has articulated and institutionalized its Self/Other relationship through the notion of civilization: in the spirit of normative distancing and distinctness, but without a complete disconnect.

Characteristically absent from Russia's 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, the term "civilization" appears in its 2008 and 2013 versions (already cited above). In these official documents the notion of a global "multicivilizationism" and the idea of global competition of civilizations introduce the term as a frame for production of Russian identity. At the same time both the official documents and public elite discourse continue to reproduce the polysemy of "civilizations" as culturally distinct units and "civilization" as synonymous with humanity as a whole, with "civilized" becoming a universal normative assessment. Inside the multicivilizational readings polysemies develop further. Positioning Russia as a "civilization state" or as a "unique civilization" is paral-

Chairman of the Management Board of the Institute of Modern Development]. Institute of Modern Development, September 16, 2011. <http://www.insor-russia.ru/ru/news/analytics/9742>. Accessed January 2, 2015.

leled by self-definitions as the “Eastern branch” of European civilization or as part of a European civilization that includes *three branches*: Russia, the EU and the USA, as Medvedev, for example, put it during his 2008 address in Berlin. (This latter strategy can be seen as a discursive “contingent intervention” into Huntington’s definition of the “Western civilization” as having “two major variants, European and North American” [1993, p. 24].)

Parallel to these partial identification strategies the Russian establishment also institutionalized civilizationalism as part of its foreign policy and soft power toolkit, meant to foster Russia’s international visibility, distinctness and global status. In 2007 Putin signed a decree establishing the Russian World Foundation (RWF) with Viacheslav Nikonov as its executive director.²⁴ The newly established institution was associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science. It was to fulfill the tasks of carrying out cultural diplomacy worldwide and of strengthening ties with various Russian diasporas both in the “near” and the “far” abroad. Cultural and humanitarian aspects were, thus, brought together in one organizational gaze. Russia’s 2008 Foreign Policy Concept also suggested that the “multimillion Russian diaspora—Russian world” was “a partner in the cause of broadening and strengthening the space of Russian language and culture,” who, along with other peoples of Russia, was making “a unique contribution to the cultural-civilizational diversity and to developing the partnership of civilizations.”²⁵ The introduction of the “Russian world” construct into foreign and domestic policy discourses was “a new sign of Russia’s growing influence in the geopolitical space,” argued Mark Neimark, director of the Foundation’s analytical department, in 2009. Working more systematically with “compatriots” implied as one of its goals assessing “the practical capacities and potential of the Russian diaspora, if not as one of the pillars of

²⁴ Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii: O sozdanii fonda ‘Russkiy mir’ [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on the establishment of the Russkiy Mir Foundation]. *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, June 23, 2007. <http://www.rg.ru/2007/06/23/fond-dok.html>. Accessed January 3, 2015.

²⁵ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia, July 15, 2008. <http://news.kremlin.ru/acts/785>. Accessed December 28, 2014.

Russian influence in Europe, then as an important factor of promoting Russia's positive image in that region."²⁶

Despite frequent use of the terms like "Russian-speaking space" in official discourse, this particular institutionalization was not linked to a specified territoriality but rather to societal, humanitarian and cultural aspects. Its gaze focused on Russian-speaking populations worldwide, and in Europe in particular. The Foundation worked on constructing "diasporas" through fostering links with those who declared themselves to be diaspora representatives. Active collaborators included members of the "old," postrevolutionary emigration such as Prince Alexandre Troubetzkoï,²⁷ executive president of the "Dialogue Franco-Russe" Association,²⁸ as well as activists of the post-Soviet "beached diasporas," among them Tatyana Zhdanok, a member of European Parliament for Latvia and an advocate for the rights of its Russian-speaking population. One intention has, thus, been to "discover" a Russian-speaking Europe inside the EU. "As we came to know, there are ten million Russians in the countries of the European Union," wrote Viacheslav Nikonov in his editor's foreword in 2008. "This is the largest national minority, and also this is a minority that for the first time is beginning to consolidate, becoming aware of their rights and starting to defend them. [...] Furthermore, Russians [russkiye] in today's world are not only those with Russian blood. This is not merely an ethnic group."²⁹ In a 2012 joint meeting of the Center for Social and Conservative Policy and the RWF, Nikonov argued, citing the Eurobarometer, that "6% percent of the European Union's population, that is EU-27, claimed they knew Russian. This is as many as those who

²⁶ Neimark, Mark. 2009. Russkiy mir v evropeyskom prostranstve [The Russian world in the European space]. *Strategy of Russia* 5 (May).

²⁷ Knyaz' Alexandre Troubetzkoï: prostranstvo russkogo yazyka – geopoliticheskoye ponyatiye [Prince Alexandre Trubetzkoï: the Russian language space is a geopolitical concept]. The Russian World Foundation Information Portal. <http://www.russkiymir.ru/fund/assembly/the-fifth-assembly-of-the-russian-world/comments/155610/>. Accessed December 23, 2014.

²⁸ Association Dialogue Franco-Russe (French-Russian Dialog). <http://dialoguefrancorusse.com/en/association-uk/the-association.html>. Accessed December 23, 2014.

²⁹ Slovo glavnogo redaktora [A word from the Chief Editor]. *Strategy of Russia* 6 (June 2008).

claimed to have known Spanish. That means in Europe there is a community of Russian speakers the size of Spain, smaller only than the English, the German and the French.”³⁰ RWF has also had ties with organizations and activists promoting an official EU status for the Russian language such as the ‘France-Ural’ Association,³¹ coestablisher of the Union of Russophones in France.³²

To provide a forum where members of the global Russian world could meet each other and influential figures of the Russian political and cultural establishment, an annual Assembly of the Russian World was held. Starting in 2007 the Assembly typically took place on November 3, on the eve of the Day of National Unity, emphasizing the role that the external dimension of the Russian world played in the semantics of national unity. Nikonov’s October 2007 editorial in *Strategiya Rossii* made use of the polysemy of the word “mir” which in Russian stands for both “world” and “peace”:

The Russian *mir* is of many meanings as is the notion “*mir*.” *Mir* is the universe, the globe, the planet. The Russian *mir* is our universe, in which we live, wherever we may be living.

Mir is harmony, absence of animosity, hatred, war. The twentieth century was tragic for the Russian *mir*. It lived through many catastrophes, colossal human losses, came to be divided, cut into parts, dispersed throughout the world. The Russian *mir* also means Russian reconciliation, accord, harmony, unification, overcoming the dissents of the twentieth century.

Mir is a society, community [obshina], circle of close people. From of old Russia has lived as a *mir* [izdavna zhila mirom]. Call it prim-

³⁰ Nikonov at a joint RWF-CSCP session. CSKP: Stenogramma sovmeznogo zasedaniya CSKP i Fonda “Russkiy mir” na temu “Gosudarstvennyy yazyk i kul’turnoye mnogoobrazie Rossii” [CSPC: Transcript of a joint CSPC and Russkiy Mir Foundation session on “State language and cultural diversity of Russia”], February 21.2012. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11461/>. Accessed January 10, 2015.

³¹ Nikonov, Viacheslav. 2012. Universal’naya tsivilizatsiya? [A universal civilization?] *Strategy of Russia* 9 (September).

³² Vazhnye etapy v istorii ‘France-Ural’ [Main stages in the history of ‘France-Ural’]. The France-Ural Association. http://franural.free.fr/site_ru/?page_id=12. Accessed January 3, 2015.

itive all you want, communality [obshinnost’], collegiality [sobornost’], collectivism were in their historical existence based on real-life practice. One needs to stress that the Russian *mir* is polyethnic, it speaks multiple languages and practices many religions.

This combination of universalism with romantic nationalism (obshinnost’, sobornost’) is notable. It suggests that, even though, strictly speaking, the humanitarian gaze of the Foundation is aimed primarily at Russian-speaking populations, the criteria of membership in the “Russian world” community are not delimited by ethnicity, or even the mother tongue. Instead, the “Russian world” encompasses a potentially broader community of those who feel somehow associated with Russia, its values, history or lifestyle.

The intraorganizational discourse of the Foundation put forth several partially overlapping and partially contradictory definitions of the Russian world as a community. Thus, universalist interpretations such as the one put forth by Nikonov emphasize a form of outreaching pluralism, as well as moral messianism. According to them, the term “Russian” has always been “a superethnic, civilizational concept. The Russian world is certainly broader than nations, borders, political systems, ideologies. It is polyethnic and polyconfessional.” Furthermore, “the Russian world should become not only a memory of the past, but a dream of a great people, a great civilization, that are capable of giving the world truth, justice, equality, dignity, sovereignty of a people that lives in peace with itself and the rest of the world.”³³

Aleksei Gromyko, director of the Foundation’s European programs, envisions the “Russian world” as consisting of concentric circles or “spheres,” formed around the nucleus of “Russia and other post-Soviet Slavic countries,” namely Belarus and Ukraine. The “nucleus” is followed by the “inner sphere” of the “near-abroad” and the “outer spheres” of “far-abroad” countries that possess large Russian-speaking minorities, are predominantly Christian Orthodox (e.g., Serbia, Cyprus, Romania) or display increased interest in Russian culture and business ties (e.g., Finland, Italy).

³³ Nikonov, Viacheslav. 2007. Vsemirnoye i natsional’noye [The universal and the national]. *Strategy of Russia* 12 (December).

There are also more language-oriented interpretations that emphasize ethnic kinship, stretching across great areas. "Apart from the Russian world, ethnographers distinguish several other ethnocultural worlds, the German, the Arab, the Chinese, the Turkic world. There is also the world of the Spanish-speaking countries of South America. Worlds are usually formed around their centers. For example, Turkey has all rights to be considered the center of the Turkic world."³⁴

Promoting the idea of a "Russian world" also suggest belonging to the party of globally significant cultures. Thus, according to Nikonov, his Foundation plays a role similar to that which the British Council fulfills for English, the Goethe Institut for German or the Cervantes Institute for Spanish languages.³⁵

Postimperial interpretations emphasize Russia's special status through its historical role as the creator of a large cultural "world." "A 'world'," writes Aleksei Gromyko,

is not identical to the spaces of former empires. The terms "Turkish world" or "Austrian world" hardly work, although a number of worlds have been empires in the past, or, rather, have descended from empires, for example, from the British Empire, the Russian Empire, or the Spanish Empire. A "world" is not always congruent or overlapping with the notion of "great power." For example, there is no German or Japanese world, though Germany and Japan are recognized great powers. But in some cases it is only fair, as the nucleus of the Russian world, the Anglo-Saxon world, and the Chinese world is made up by a great power. Finally, a "world" is not the same as civilization, though these two concepts have much in common. [...] A world can be larger than a civilization. For example, the African world. [...] It can be smaller than a civilization. For instance, the French or Spanish world that are both part of the European civilization. [...] The distinctive quality of the Russian world—that would make it unique, were it not for

³⁴ Toloraya, Georgiy. 2010. Edinstvo i bor'ba mirov [Unity and rivalry of the worlds] *Strategy of Russia* 3 (March). Georgiy Toloraya was regional director for Asia and Africa for the Russian World Foundation.

³⁵ Nikonov, Viacheslav. 2008. Russkiye bystro uchatsa [The Russians learn quickly]. *Strategy of Russia* 8 (August).

the existence of the Chinese world—is that it fits the notion of “empire,” as well as “great power,” as well as “civilization.”³⁶

Overall, this scholastically nuanced and oftentimes confusing conceptual practice suggests that, despite its institutionalization as part of Russia’s “soft power” practices, the notion of a “Russian world” does not have a stable definition, neither in terms of spatial nor social delimitations, even as far as the internal RWF discourse examined here is concerned. However, a common denominator for this discourse seems to be that it chooses not to limit itself strictly to the issues of ethnicity or ethnic diasporas, but tends to place an emphasis on Russia’s role as a distinct culture with a global or civilizational dimension.

A “civilizational multilateralism”?

Pluralist visions that constantly compare and contrast the Russian world to the Chinese, the Anglo-Saxon, the American, the European and other “worlds” are isomorphic with the conventional Russian vision of a multipolar international order at least in some respects, and particularly in the premium they put on great cultures and large cultural spaces and the related implications of status. The civilizational guise can thus also serve for articulations of new, refined versions of multipolarity. Such is the case of Nikonov’s “concert of civilizations” concept that promotes a “polycentric” and “multicivilizational” international system built on civilizational diversity:

Recently, it has been often said that one could regard the BRICS as the nucleus of a future concert of powers, a new concert, analogous to the one known from the nineteenth-century European history. By the way, that concert secured for Europe the most peaceful century in its history. The idea of a concert is interesting as such, but in this context, we can speak not so much of a concert of powers as about a concert of civilizations. Because each member of the BRICS is a center of its own civilizational society

³⁶ Gromyko, Aleksei. 2010. Printsipy, tsennosti, struktura [Principles, values, structure]. *Strategy of Russia* 3 (March).

[civilizatsionnoye soobshchestvo], and we are looking at five civilizations that can engage in dialog with other civilizations on a competitive basis. And the only other civilizations are the Western and the Islamic civilizations. To some extent we can talk about a Japanese one. Therefore, BRICS today has a majority in the intercivilizational dialog.³⁷

This civilizational framing of the multipolarity and multilateralism doctrines also found its way into Russia's 2013 Foreign Policy Concept. Thus, it insists that global governance requires a collective leadership that is "representative in geographical and civilizational respects." To secure that, Russia intends "to build up cooperation in formats such as the G20, BRICS, the G8, RIC (Russia, India, China), the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization)" and other platforms.³⁸

Viacheslav Nikonov, whom Putin appointed as director of the RWF, was also systematically preoccupied with the BRICS. In 2008 Nikonov organized the first conference of BRICS policy experts and policymakers which took place on the premises of the RWF. Following the event, Nikonov prepared a bilingual summary that put forth the idea that a "rallying factor" in the BRICS was the presence of "four great civilizations: two ancient civilizations with a history of thousands of years—Chinese and Indian; Russian civilization which is 1,000 years old; and a younger, Brazilian civilization which is an embodiment of the dynamic culture of the Latin American continent, embracing all the features of other countries in the region" (Nikonov 2009, p. 50). In 2011, upon instructions from Dmitry Medvedev, the National Committee on BRICS Research (NCR-BRICS) was cofounded by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Rus-

³⁷ Nikonov, Viacheslav. 2012. Ot kontserta derzhav – k kontsertu tsivilizatsiy [From the concert of powers to the concert of civilizations]. *Strategy of Russia* 11 (November).

³⁸ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V. Putiny 12 Fevralya 2013 [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation on February 12, 2013]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 18, 2013. http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F. Accessed December 28, 2014.

sian World Foundation with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁹ The Ministry representative, Vladimir Lukov, characteristically avowed that for Russia membership in the BRICS was to a great extent “a civilizational choice.”⁴⁰

Organizationally, NCR-BRICS also maintained close links with the RWF. Nikonov became chair of the board of directors and Georgiy Toloraya, RWF regional director for Asia and Africa, became its executive director. The research institution was also linked to the Institute for Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences, whose director, Mikhail Titarenko, chairs the NCR-BRICS presidium. Titarenko—a regular contributor to Nikonov’s *Strategy of Russia*—has also authored a number of works, concerning *inter alia* Russia’s relations with China, the “geopolitical and civilizational basis of Russia’s Asian policy” (2008), Russia’s identity as a “Euro-Pacific” power (2012) and Eurasianism as Russia’s foreign policy “paradigm” (1998).

NCR-BRICS, together with the *Strategy of Russia*, served as discursive sites where civilizational approaches were routinely married to BRICS-inspired multilateralist doctrines. NCR-BRICS research materials make ample use of civilizational vocabulary. They quote the Foreign Policy Concept on “civilizational competition,” and prioritize the creation of a “polycentric, multicivilizational world order”⁴¹ that would secure “an alliance of civilizations” instead of a “clash of civilizations.”⁴² A particularly interesting feature is the Russian projection of “civilizational” identities onto other BRICS members: “One can assume that within the BRICS format Brazil, in the long term, will

³⁹ Prilepina, Oksana. 2013. Lidery myslyat shire [Leaders keep an open mind]. *Russian World Journal*, October 2013. Available: <http://www.ruskiymir.ru/media/magazines/article/99223/>. Accessed January 30, 2015.

⁴⁰ Prilepina, Oksana. 2011. Ochevidnaya real’nost’ [An obvious reality]. *Russian World Journal*, 2011 October. Available: <http://www.ruskiymir.ru/media/magazines/article/100249/>. Accessed January 30, 2015.

⁴¹ Kozlovskiy E., Komarov M., Makrushim R. Braziliya, Rossiya, Indiya, Kitay, Yuzhno-Afrikanskaya Respublika: strategiya nedropol’zovaniya [Brazil, Russia, India, China, the South African Republic: A strategy for mineral development]. NCR-BRICS, 2013. Available: http://www.brics.mid.ru/brics.nsf/BRICS_nedropolzovanie_2013.pdf. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁴² Ibid.

opt to preserve its status as a ‘country-civilization’ [strana-civilizaciya] that informally represents the whole South American subcontinent.”⁴³

The doctrines of civilizational multilateralism as a world order model revolve around two principle ideas. Both are inherent in the polysemy around which the discourses of Russian civilization operate. The first idea is the notion of civilizations as distinct cultural tradition and corresponds to the romantic-nationalist hailing of values and tradition embedded in its cultural core. The second idea is derived from the image of civilizations as spaces of harmonious pluralism, universalist inclusive communities that sustain diversity and effectively reconcile cultural difference. The civilizational multilateralism doctrine, as spelled out by Nikonov, links this alleged civilizational know-how to the envisioned world order model:

The affiliation of these [BRICS] countries with different civilizations is not necessarily a divisive factor, since each of them has a centuries-old history of cultural and religious tolerance. The BRICS do not interfere in each other’s affairs or any other countries’ affairs for that matter, and accept their partners as they have been for centuries. The four civilizations have unique cultural, religious and trading traditions, different approaches to diplomacy and their own development model, and they view this diversity as a great asset. (2009, p. 50)

Thus, a civilizational identity entails not only claiming cultural distinctness and international status, but promoting an alternative, pluralist world model that stems directly from the alleged domestic experience of the so-called civilization states. These notions are basis for the ideology of a “dialog of civilizations,” a new model of the international order that is supposed to supersede the intrusive and homogenizing approaches characteristic of Western unilateralism.

⁴³ Strategiya Rossii v BRIKS: tseli i instrumenty [Strategy of Russia in the BRICS: Aims and instruments]. NCR-BRICS, 2013. Available: http://www.nkibrics.ru/system/asset_publications/data/53c7/b39f/676c/7631/4009/0000/original/strategiya-rossii-v-briks-tseli-i-instrumenty.pdf?1408705835. Accessed December 30, 2014.

Starting from 2002 the Russian establishment has been engaged in the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” (WPF-DC) through Vladimir Yakunin who acted as its founding president. WPF-DC is a multidisciplinary international network bringing together representatives of the civil society, state institutions, business, academia and religious organizations. The “Dialogue of Civilizations” program started on May 19, 2002, at the Cathedral Square of the Moscow Kremlin. It followed up on the 2001 UN resolution “Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations”⁴⁴ initiated by the Iranian president Mohammad Khatami.⁴⁵ Cochairmen and founders of the forum have included the Indian social scientist and activist Jagdish Kapur, Austria’s former Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and a Greek-American businessman Nicholas Papanicolaou. The Forum holds an annual conference on Rhodes supported by Yakunin’s St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation.⁴⁶ It has had two headquarters, in Vienna (since 2006) and in Moscow.

WPF-DC is part of the official Russian civilizational multilateralism project. It is informed by a concern about what it sees as a “lop-sided” world, entailing “unjustified use violence against sovereignty, security, and culture of other nations.”⁴⁷ It aims at building an international community capable of “establishing a new conceptual framework as counterweight to prevailing global tendencies, to the conventional manner of expressing the world problems in assessing the ‘threats from the Third World’ and the ‘inevitability’ of the clash of civilizations.” The Forum puts forth as its objective defining “the difference between so called ‘global values’ and authentic, true moral values” and

⁴⁴ UN General Assembly. Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, A/RES/56/6, 21 November 2001. <http://www.un.org/documents/ares566e.pdf>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁴⁵ World Public Forum – Dialogue of Civilization: History. <http://wpfdc.org/about-us/history>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁴⁶ Nikonov, Viacheslav. 2008. Russkiye bystro uchatsa [The Russians learn quickly]. *Strategy of Russia* 8 (August 2008).

⁴⁷ Dialogue of Civilizations for a Humane Order. World Public Forum – Dialogue of Civilization, October 30, 2003. <http://rhodesforum.org/dialogue-of-civilizations/629-dialogue-of-civilizations-for-a-humane-order>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

bringing “a non-Western perspective in concert with the main Western conceptions.”⁴⁸

This international network can be seen as a nonstate-centric form of institutionalizing the civilizational discourse—in contrast to the discourse of the BRICS-inspired “civilizational multilateralism,” which remains tied to the intergovernmental framework both organizationally and conceptually. (NRC-BRICS was created on the instructions of Dmitry Medvedev, implementing the agreements of the 2011 Sanya BRICS summit.) The WPF, on the contrary, is positioned by its founding president Vladimir Yakunin as a nongovernmental civic initiative,⁴⁹ though Yakunin’s position as a wealthy businessman and one-time president of Russian Railways is indicative of his high rank inside the ruling establishment. In parallel he has served at Lomonosov Moscow State University as chair of the Institute of State Policy of the Faculty of Political Sciences. (The dean of the Faculty was none other than Nikonov, with whom Yakunin was also associated through the RWF Board of Trustees.)

Yakunin is a doctor of political sciences (*doktor nauk*).⁵⁰ Among his works is a book (2013) on “new technologies of fighting the Russian statehood” authored in collaboration with experts of the Sulakshin Center (alias the Center for Scientific Political Thought and Ideology).⁵¹ The book explores Western “cognitive weapons” as instruments of “cultural desovereignization” directed against Russia as the last bulwark opposing Western civilizational expansionism. (Compare this argument with the theme of “spiritual sovereignty” and the securitization of “soft power” as an instrument of “information wars.”)

⁴⁸ World Public Forum – Dialogue of Civilization: Community <http://wpfdc.org/community>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁴⁹ Yakunin interview published in *Izvestia* in 2008: Prezident OAO ‘Rossiyskiye zheleznnye dorogi’ Vladimir Yakunin: “My menyayem real’nye tsennosti na zelenovaty bumazhki” [President of Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin: “We exchange real values for green paper”]. *Izvestia*, February 20, 2008. <http://izvestia.ru/news/333501#ixzz3RofPQpjT>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁵⁰ Profile of V. Yakunin, website of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Moscow Lomonosov State University. <http://polit.msu.ru/staff/yakunin/>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁵¹ Sulakshin Center website: <http://rusrand.ru/>.

Yakunin's patronage of the St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation and the Center of National Glory also put him in an important position as far as the political economy of Russia's civilizational discourses is concerned. In 2010 the Foundation organized a naval expedition in the Black Sea region to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the exodus of the fleeing White Army from Crimea.⁵² Participants included numerous heirs of Russian émigrés as well as members of Russia's intellectual establishment. The expedition was meant as a symbolic reconciliation of the fragmented Russian world.⁵³

Yakunin's combination of past secret service background and active engagement with the Moscow Patriarchate earned him the ironic nickname of an "Orthodox Chekist" (Laruelle 2009, p. 74). According to Laruelle, his Orthodox connection make the WPF-DG over which he presides "a window display-case to promote the [Moscow] Patriarchate abroad, which prefers to play the card of the 'dialogue of civilizations' instead of that of ecumenism." At the same time, it is "also a discrete instrument of Russian foreign policy, which likes to emphasize the existence of a specific Orthodox civilization" (Laruelle 2009, p. 58).

Yakunin himself has positioned the "dialogue of civilizations" as a forerunner to a new global doctrine that could supersede neoliberalism:

I would be cautious in trusting Professor Fukuyama blindly on the end of history. It has been declared before, even prior to World War I. The end has come not to human history, but to the neoliberal era. [...] The world is left not just without a dominant ideology but without ideology as such. So the "dialogue of civilizations" is, perhaps, a forerunner to the formation of a new ideology and a new world order. The initiative does come from

⁵² Morskoy pokhod k 90-letiyu iskhoda Russkoy armii iz Kryma [A naval expedition to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the exodus of the Russian army from Crimea]. Center of National Glory <http://archive.cnsr.ru/projects.php?id=36>. Accessed December 29, 2014.

⁵³ Yakunin, published in *Po razlomam istorii* [At the fault lines of history]. *Strategy of Russia* 10 (October 2010).

Russia, from the Center of National Glory, the St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation.⁵⁴

Overall, one could argue that strong links exist between domestic discourses on Russian civilizationism and international positioning of Russia as a civilization through its “soft power” tools. Some of these tools are official, while other ones are more “discreet,” as Laruelle has put it. These links are both organizational and ideological. The conceptual, ideological underpinning of these links is the idea of “civilization” as a *modus vivendi*, a bearer of know-how for constructing a post-Western pluralist world order. Furthermore, his civilizational know-how makes Russian civilization a kind of a microcosm or a model for this envisioned order. As Putin himself phrased it during his 2007 address at the reception for the heads of diplomatic missions: “Russia does have an offer for Europe. We are prepared to share our unique, centuries old experience of cooperation of various ethnies, cultures, confessions, to play a constructive role in securing civilizational compatibility [civilizatsionnaya sovmeštmost] in Europe.”⁵⁵

Juxtaposed against the “melting pot” and “multiculturalism” as Western models that receive a negative reading, Russian civilization is put forth as an alternative universality where domestic and international aspects of pluralism become linked by one ideology of civilizationism. Through its official institutionalization civilizationism as an international doctrine is thus linked to domestic national identity-building practices.

⁵⁴ Yakunin interview published in *Izvestia* in 2008: Prezident OAO ‘Rossiyskiye zheleznye dorogi’ Vladimir Yakunin: “My menyayem real’nye tsennosti na zelenovatyie bumazhki” [President of Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin: “We change real values for green paper”]. *Izvestia*, February 20, 2008. <http://izvestia.ru/news/333501#ixzz3RofPQpjT>. Accessed December 30, 2014.

⁵⁵ V. Putin. Vystupleniye v chest’ glav diplomatičeskikh missiy [Address at the reception for the heads of diplomatic missions]. President of Russia, November 28, 2007. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/11/28/1808_type63374type63377type82634_152426.shtml. Accessed December 29, 2014.

Summary: Civilizational approach as cultural regionalism and identity-building strategy

As Chapter 3 showed civilizationism gained the status of a legitimate and highly popular vocabulary in post-Soviet Russia. It is institutionalized in the curricula and actively used by researchers, political essayists and members of the political establishment. Furthermore, as existing scholarship argues, in many cases the so-called “civilizational approach” effectively replaced Marxism-Leninism as the new ideology, inheriting the old habit of dogmatism and essentialism from the preceding totalitarian intellectual practice. The vocabulary of civilizationism had strong domestic roots in Russia with its traditional debate of Westernizers and Slavophiles which was typically conceived as a debate on distinct civilizations. On the other hand, the civilizational discourse was also an imported one, quoting Western ideas about the imminent clash of civilizations. In that particular sense, the Russian discourse also reflects the post-Cold War Western debates on the future of international relations. However, the image is rather skewed, as if by a false mirror, as these debates are reduced to a Manichean struggle between Fukuyama’s and Huntington’s visions of this future.

In post-Soviet Russia the “civilizational approach” thus combines a well-established domestic tradition with an alibi of foreign expertise. An examination of the post-Soviet intellectual environment reveals array of milieus that reproduced the discourse of the “Russian civilization.” These milieus are linked to a number of political or normative projects which exhibit different degrees of culturally defined conservatism and anti-Westernism. The rise of civilizationism in domestic politics and official foreign policy discourses, thus, did not appear “out of the blue.” It was anticipated by a plethora of semi-official discourses, some of which even elaborated particular concepts for official use.

As I argue, however, the choice of civilizationism as an identity-building strategy is no accident and the key to understanding that lies in examining the convenient polysemy of the term civilization itself. The notion of civilization is useful in virtue of its ability to simultaneously harbor homogeneity and heterogeneity. Cultural homogeneity is emphasized in those discourses that speak of a Russian “cultural core,” of cultural and normative integrity and of distinctness from the Western

other which is cast in terms of cultural particularism. The integrity of a “civilization,” understood holistically, also plays an important suturing role when it comes to territorial, humanitarian and other forms of identity fragmentation which shape Russia’s post-Soviet experience.

The heterogeneity, on the other hand, is invoked when Russia is narrativized as a pluralist or supranational entity, a “civilization-state” that unites many different cultures under the aegis of Russians as the nation of state builders. Furthermore, such an entity is not necessarily congruent with the Russian Federation. Indeed, terms such as “country of the Russian world” point to a particular form of cultural regionalism. The Russian world as a discourse and as a cultural diplomacy framework draws on the ideas of civilizationism to construct a supranational entity both *in* and *around* Russia. This is where identity-building practices overlap with a particular form of region-building discourse and practice. Furthermore, the presented visions of Russia as a core of a distinct civilization or cultural region are also crucial for Russia’s identity because of the promise of global status as a pillar of the multipolar or multilateral world order.

It is in virtue of this that I choose to speak of regionalism as an identitary enterprise, in other words, as a discourse that aims to kill two birds with one stone. Taking the argument further I also suggest that it is not unique in this. The cultural regionalism of Russian civilization is paralleled by the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism which is both different and at the same time structurally similar. As the following chapters demonstrate, the structural similarity can be observed at all three levels. While also pursuing its own form of depoliticization through a technical and economic façade, the discourse on Eurasian integration includes articulations of Eurasian integration as the new national project, as Russia’s mission of leading a regional economic bloc. It is therefore also an identitary enterprise that goes far beyond the simple logic of economic welfare maximization. And as with civilizational or cultural regionalism, Eurasian integration is narrativized as a “building bloc” of a future multipolar order, in which Russia deserves to have its respectable place. Finally, as it is with civilizationism, the lynchpin that holds these discourses together is the Western other. Subsequent chapters elaborate on the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism to highlight these similarities in more detail.

CHAPTER 6

Toward a “Eurasian Union”? Economic Regionalism and Reconstitution of Russian Identity

Previous chapters discussed the role of civilizational discourses in constructing Russia's identity as a supranational entity in the form of a cultural region. Being in many respects a strongly nativist discourse, civilizationism is, at the same time, an attempt to plug into globally established discourses on civilizations, Huntington's ideas being its constant reference point. This chapter opens the discussion of the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism, which, as I argue, performs a structurally similar function for Russian identity. Different in their pedigree, the two discourses share a number of similarities in their inherent grammar. These similarities have to do with Russia's symbolic stance vis-à-vis the Western Other, identitary concerns of its population, and political agendas of its establishments.

One similarity between the two discourses has to do with their imported nature. In Chapter 2 I pointed out the existence of a globally established discourse on regional economic integration. This discourse can be seen as a pillar of the Western neoliberal hegemony which also exhibits a strong degree of Eurocentrism. Consequently, Eurasian regionalism is a case of an economic regionalist discourse that plugs into the broader, universalist structures of meanings related to regional integration, development and economic exchange. Similarly to civilizationism, Eurasian regionalism is, thus, a result of selective borrowing and reappropriation of vocabularies that *inter alia* also have a legitimating and empowering effect on the agents of articulation. In the

discourse of Eurasian regionalism, the notions of integration and economic regional union fulfill a role similar to the role played by the construct of Russian civilization in civilizational discourses.

Furthermore, the importance of European integration as a constitutive Other for economic regionalist discourses here overlaps strongly with the more general historical tendency to other “Europe” or the “West” in order to produce definitions of the Russian Self. And if, as I argue, the construct of a “Eurasian Union” is an identitary proxy for the Russian national Self, then definitions of Eurasian integration are produced in a nexus with definitions of European integration. The discourse thus provides Russia’s long-established identitary “relationship” with Europe (Neumann 1996) with a new set of vocabularies to run on. This chapter, as well as Chapter 7, examines the discourse of Eurasian regionalism in detail in order to demonstrate how economic regionalism forms a nexus with identity production in ways which parallel the cultural regionalist discourse of civilizationism.

Eurasianisms and economic regionalism: Locating the discourse

Methodologically speaking isolating Eurasian regionalism as a discourse can be a challenge for several reasons. One of them is the fact that Eurasian integration is an international enterprise, so its discursive practices stretch across national borders into what still remains a shared post-Soviet, Russian-speaking discursive space. This is less of a problem if the examination explicitly focuses on discursive practices of the Russian establishment, which makes it easier to isolate the object of analysis. Yet another problem lies in the fact that there has been a specifically broad variety of discursive practices associated with the term “Eurasia,” many of them geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic, which makes the term itself “inflated” (Umland 2007, p. 142). Laruelle thus speaks of Eurasianism as an ideology with a “variable geometry” which combines contradictory approaches.¹

¹ “L’eurasisme est une idéologie à géométrie variable, susceptible des approches les plus contradictoires, une constellation hétéroclite de milieux et surtout de personnalités qui, si elles ont en commun une conception impériale de la Russie, ne partagent pas toujours les mêmes présupposés” (Laruelle 2001, p. 449).

The label of "Eurasianism" has been attached to varieties of geopolitical thought ever since the Russian interwar émigré movement (Laruelle 2008) and has haunted Russian intellectual life ever since. Those speaking from the position of a "Eurasianist" tend to emphasize continuity between different strands of this thought. Yet, in truth, this looks much more like an effort to construct an image of an intellectual tradition, than to reconstruct any actual intellectual influence or inheritance. Constructing a respectable and established intellectual tradition from a set of rather heterogeneous discursive practices thus serves the important purpose of self-legitimation for those striving to inscribe themselves in this tradition. (For examples of constructing continuity between the alleged different "stages" of Eurasianist thought, see Laruelle 2001; Umland 2007.)

None of that is of immediate concern to the present study. However, as the Eurasian theme was mediatized intensively in recent years, a question naturally arises: How does researching Eurasian economic regionalism relate to other discourses that exist under the label of Eurasianism? For it is true that, for example, the interwar émigré Eurasianist thinkers, whose writing was grounded in romantic-culturalist ideas, clearly have more to do with civilizational discourses than with discourses of economic regionalism. At the same time, the two types of discourses are not always easily isolated. As I pointed out earlier, discursive practice makes the agendas of culture, economy and security overlap and hybridize. On the part of articulatory agents, one can observe the tendency toward discursive bandwagoning and exploiting mutually reinforcing and legitimizing synergies. Thus, an ideological entrepreneur such as Dugin, with his "neo-Eurasianism," has long desired co-optation into the official frame of Eurasian economic integration established by the Russian authorities. On the other hand, post-Soviet rulers have also sometimes sought to ground their policies in seemingly respectable, even if intellectually remote, ideological foundations. An obvious example here is the Kazakhstani cult of the Eurasianist Lev Gumilev, created by president Nazarbayev as part of his official Eurasianist doctrine (Laruelle 2008, pp. 171–187). Somewhat similar trends can be observed with regard to Putin's regime and its attempts to plug into Russian conservative intellectual legacies. Its interest in early-twentieth-century Russian religious and conservative philosophers is demonstrated by a growing number of references in official discourse to thinkers like Ivan Ilyin or Nicholas Berdyayev.

All in all, when the living fabric of discourse is examined, isolating Eurasianism understood as a discourse of economic regional integration from other intellectual enterprises that also stylize themselves as “Eurasianist” can sometimes be challenging. In this study, Eurasian regionalism is treated as a set of discursive resources that include basic notions common to all economic regionalisms, such as states, interstate economic exchange and cooperation or regional economic institutions. Thus states, their elites and economic interests serve as the primary point of departure for this discourse as opposed, for instance, to culturally or geographically defined entities around which civilizational or geopolitical discourses are built. Secondly, discursive practices are subjected to a political hierarchy. Eurasian economic regionalism is an elite project that the ruling elites articulate. The official discourse, thus, institutes a “nodal point”: the idea of “Eurasian integration” or a “Eurasian Union.” Semi-official discourses, produced at sites such as think tanks, movements or political parties, reinterpret the official agenda, sometimes mutating it and enriching it with their own discursive content. Advancing various agendas under the hegemonic label can also be viewed as competition for political capital, influence and resources that happens between various domestic actors, whether between the ruling party and the opposition, or between different branches of the establishment, which can benefit from the domination of particular agendas such as security or economics. So, the top-down, hierarchical model of discourse does not presuppose that those who primarily articulate the discourse on Eurasian integration actually own or fully control it. They merely set a hegemonic frame for the multiple contesting interpretations that emerge at various sites of discourse production. At the same time, this hegemonic frame can be isolated by tracing the privileged speech acts and the language of economic regionalism that originally constituted it.

“Eurasia” in post–Cold War Russia: Economic regionalism as a partial identification strategy

Following up on the previous point, I analyze Eurasian integration as a discourse that is rooted in vocabularies of regional economic integration and articulated primarily by post-Soviet ruling classes. These vocabularies owe their legitimizing and empowering capacity to the

official identities of newly independent states who, following the breakup of the USSR, embraced democracy and market economy as their core principles. Post-Soviet neoliberal economic regionalism is thus, part of the broader picture shaped by what Fukuyama called the "end of history". With the collapse of Communism, the ideology of political and economic liberalism apparently enjoyed a final triumph over rival universalist ideologies. As Levitsky and Way put it (quoting Whitehead), "in the post-Cold War era, as in interwar Eastern Europe, the disappearance of a military, economic, and ideological alternative to the liberal West had a major impact on peripheral states. For example, it created an 'almost universal wish to imitate a way of life associated with the liberal capitalist democracies of the core regimes,' which encouraged the diffusion of Western democratic models" (2010, p. 17).

Prior to the End of History moment ideological differences were a major source of identity production in Russia. The USSR's self-definition as a Communist project hinged on the othering of the "West" as a congregation of capitalist-bourgeois societies under American leadership. Hence, identity was not built primarily on the basis of geographical borders. Notably, the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" not only contained no references to Russia as a national entity, but also none with respect to any geographical delimitations. It was formulated as a universalist project potentially embracing the whole globe.

Liberal hegemony made the centering of identity around messianic universalism problematic. At this point geography was to return, and the notion of "Eurasia" to surface in some of the first attempts to redefine Russia's traditional space of political influence. In 1989 Andrei Sakharov put forth a constitution project for the Union Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia, or European-Asiatic Union (*Evropeysko-Aziatskiy Soyuz*) as a confederation of sovereign states, built on principles of "market and competition."² The pattern was repeated by the Commonwealth Independent States formed immediately in the wake of disintegration. The Almaty Declaration, adopted less than two weeks after the Belavezha agreements dissolving the USSR and signed by nine

² Sakharov A.D. *Konstitutsiya Soyuz Sovetskikh Respublik Evropy i Azii* [Constitution for the Union Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia]. Sakharov Archives. <http://www.sakharov-archive.ru/Raboty/Constitution.htm>. Accessed December 15, 2014.

former Soviet constituent republics, confirmed the legal existence of “independent states” who vowed to build “democratic constitutional states,” respect each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty and confirmed their “commitment to cooperation in forming and developing a common economic area, common European and Eurasian markets.”³ Commitment to common market and the “four freedoms” (goods, service, labor and capital) was subsequently inscribed in the 1993 CIS Charter.⁴

In the following decades the post-Soviet area “witnessed a stream of initiatives directed towards economic integration,” “generating high volumes of international agreements and a multitude of high profile political meetings,” however, with miniscule impact with regard to the officially declared objectives (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2013, p. 2). The process of launching yet new initiatives was highly repetitive not only in the way it recycled the same economic objectives and ideologies, but with the “very same actors” grouping “together again and again,” creating a confusing post-Soviet “alphabet soup” of stillborn initiatives (Wirminghaus 2012, p. 26). Intense activism as combined to low commitment and effectiveness has led some to suggest that the primary objectives of post-Soviet regionalism was to secure a “civilized divorce” (ibid., p. 30) between the newly independent states, rather than to implement the officially declared common market goals. Tellingly, as Vymyatnina and Antonova argue, even if post-Soviet integration “has been extensively discussed in the political sciences and regionalism literature,” the economists, on the contrary, “were not so concerned with the integration projects since most of them did not imply any serious economic integration” (2014, p. 9).

From this point of view, economic integration could be seen as an official pretext for engaging each other, forming what Hurrell (2007, p. 45) has called the “public face” of regionalism. Economics as a

³ Alma-Atinskaya Deklaratsiya [The Almaty Declaration]. Single register of legal acts and other documents of the Commonwealth of Independent States. <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=4>. Accessed December 15, 2014.

⁴ Ustav Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv [The Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States]. CIS Executive Committee. <http://cis.minsk.by/page.php?id=180>. Accessed December 15, 2014.

depoliticized vocabulary of mutually beneficial cooperation, thus, concealed potentially more sensitive issues that had to do with the gradual strengthening of sovereignty of the newly independent states and their departure from the hierarchical, Moscow-centric mode of organization in the region. As Dragneva remarks, "adhering to international law in the post-USSR world was a statement of sovereignty rather than necessarily a reflection of a commitment to being bound beyond the realm of political pledges" (Dragneva 2013, p. 42). The tendency toward economization and depoliticization of regional integration also strengthened as cooperation evolved from the multipurpose framework Commonwealth of Independent States toward more specific agendas under the Eurasian Economic Community, established in 2000.⁵

Put in this perspective, post-Soviet economic regionalism can be seen as a dominant vocabulary, concurrent with the globally established discourse of the so-called new regionalism. New regionalism embraced the neoliberal principles of integration that hinged on the idea of regional common markets. These principles also resonated well with the official identities adopted by the post-Soviet newly independent states, which now presented themselves as "market economies" and "democracies," thus inscribing themselves in the post-Cold War liberal ideological hegemony.

This is true in particular for Russia. Under Putin, Russia actively embraced the hegemonic neoliberal ideology and demonstrated its effort to integrate into the global structures of economic governance built on neoliberal principles. On the one hand, Putin's rule involved some serious overhauling of the Yeltsin era. Putin distanced himself politically from those policies that had been implemented by Yeltsin under the label of Westernizer liberalism and had incurred particularly high social costs. Putin's state-building project was about overcoming

⁵ Other key agendas were outsourced to post-Soviet security regionalisms, represented primarily by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). While important in terms of understanding the overall dynamics in the region this "Russian-centered security integration" (Wirtinghaus 2012, p. 27) has never become politicized to the extent of Eurasian economic integration. Consequently, the construct of a regional Eurasian economic union rather than a regional collective defense organization has served as a frame for identity production.

the turmoil and perceived injustice of the 1990s through recentralization of political power in Russia. The marauding Russian oligarchs were reigned in, and the “commanding heights” of the economy were “recaptured” by the state (Rutland 2010, p. 162). However, recentralization of economic power did not mean abolition of capitalism, merely its mutation into a form of “state capitalism” or “neopatrimonialism” (Derluguian 2011), whereby control over major assets would be redistributed in favor of a different, and more consolidated, constellation of elite networks organized around the president.

This was accompanied by continued integration of Russia into the global economic exchange in the role of a key raw materials supplier. Notably, this was even reflected in the establishment’s self-stylizations such as the idea of Russia as an “energy superpower” (see Sakwa 2009, pp. 370–379). In terms of Wallerstein’s (2000) world-systems approach, Russia’s position in the global division of labor could now be described as peripheral capitalism. Consequently, some argue that this position has endowed it with the ambiguous stance of a “subaltern empire” that both partially identifies with and rejects the neoliberal world order according to a logic of hybridity:

Russia’s relations with the European Union are perhaps the best example of the country’s subaltern position vis-à-vis the West, which reveals many features typical of postcolonial settings. The whole structure of the relationship is obviously asymmetrical: in 2011, 79.5 percent of the EU’s imports from Russia consisted of fuel and mining products, whereas exports were dominated by machinery and transport equipment (49.7 percent). Russia sells mostly raw materials and buys high-value-added goods—a trade structure typical of a relationship between an industrialized center and an underdeveloped periphery. Worse, a similar pattern is now developing in its trade with China, thus making Russia’s retreat to the periphery even more complete. (Morozov 2013b, p. 21)

Consequently, as Morozov writes, Russia’s “subaltern imperialist foreign policy” has been characterized by “two distinct and contradictory trends”: “on the one hand, Russia promotes BRICS as an alliance of emerging powers that are allegedly not complicit in Western colonialism and thus, are better positioned to establish a new, more equal

and just world order. On the other hand, Russia increasingly parades its own imperial nostalgia as a justification for Putin's pet project of a Eurasian Union" (ibid., p. 20).

This ambiguity with respect to neoliberal hegemony is, thus, illustrated by the desire to both set up counterhegemonic global governance frameworks, such as the BRICS, and to pursue membership in the existing order by partaking in its key arrangements such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Being an epitome of this pursuit, Russia's WTO membership (2012) also reveals, as some suggest, a political imperative of being present in the global decision-making placed ahead of economic goals proper:

In a 2002 speech, Putin stressed the need for Russia to be present in the decision-making process in the world economy, ahead of highlighting the importance of opening the economy to foreign competition. He stated that accession "is not an absolute evil and not an absolute good. And it is not an award for good behavior. The WTO is a tool. Those who know how to use it become stronger." This illustrates Putin's wider concern with Russia assuming its role as a great power with global reach. Within this rationale, WTO entry is as much about gaining influence in global forums as it is about the organization itself. Indeed, the state capitalism promoted by Vladimir Putin during his two terms as president is in direct contradiction with the general principles of free trade: the support for "national champions" to reintegrate economic activity with government policy and replace foreign companies contradicts the WTO's liberal approach. (Fean 2012, p. 10)

Russia's attitude toward international economic integration can thus be described as having been essentially twofold. It combined partial identification with the neoliberal order with a deep concern about international status and power. This combination is well reflected in self-stylizations that its establishment fashioned, such as that of an "energy superpower" or a "liberal empire." The term "liberal empire" was introduced into Russian political discourse by Anatoly Chubais, a prominent reformer during the Yeltsin era and a co-opted liberal under Putin.

As part of the program of "liberal imperialism" Chubais' article suggested a set of policies in the "neighboring countries" that included:

1) promoting Russian culture and protecting Russians and Russian speakers; 2) assisting in the expansion of Russian business and acquisition of assets; and 3) developing and, if necessary, defending democratic institutions and human rights. All this was to be done while respecting borders and territorial integrity. The goal of Russia's EU and NATO accession was to be rejected in favor of the more prestigious membership in "the ring of great democracies of the North" that, according to Chubais, encompassed the United States, the united Europe, Japan—and the future "Russian liberal empire."⁶

The concept of liberal imperialism could not be developed into a foreign policy doctrine *tout court* because, as Chubais himself acknowledged, "empire" had become a "swearword," associated with the Communist past, and could not be used alongside words like "civilization," "democracy" or "market." But the notions of economic expansionism as a stepping stone to international status and influence persisted. As some IR scholars suggested, under Putin, Russia was on its way to restoring its empire, "if not by tanks, then by banks" (Tsygankov 2006).

Toward a Eurasian Union: A new "national idea"?

Post-Soviet states embraced the globally established neoliberal discourse immediately in the wake of the collapse of Communism. Its pivotal ideas, such as the "four freedoms"-based common market, have been recycled, time and again, in multiple regionalist arrangements throughout the post-Soviet period. In light of this, one can safely argue that there was rather little that was genuinely novel in the ideas on Eurasian economic integration which the Russian establishment promoted in 2007–2013. What *was* new, however, was the international context. In 2007 Putin gave his Munich speech, which laid a new emphasis on global "multipolarity." The speech displayed a principle concern about *sovereignty*. Given the complexity of this term, one needs to specify, that Putin's usage was much less about its formal aspects and more

⁶ Chubais, Anatoliy. 2013. Missiya Rossii v XXI veke [Russia's mission in the 21st century]. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 10. http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2003-10-01/1_mission.html. Accessed December 20, 2014.

about the global distribution of power and possibilities to influence the making of key international decisions: "What is this unipolar world? However this term is embellished, at the end of the day it means in practice one thing: one ruling center, one center of power, one center of decision-making. This is a world of one master, one sovereign."⁷

Putin's understanding of sovereignty as an "exclusive" rather than equally shared attribute can be extracted from yet another speech he gave in 2007:

If we were to speak entirely frankly, there are not so many countries in the world today that would have the pleasure and happiness to claim they are sovereign. You could count them on one hand. Those are China, India, Russia and several other countries. The rest are in particular form of deep dependence, either on each other or on their bloc's leader. This is not very pleasant, but this is my deep conviction, and it is true. I know that, unfortunately, in some Eastern European countries not only the nominees for defense minister, but even less important civil servants are agreed with the US ambassador. [...] This is why sovereignty is a very precious thing today, you could say, exclusive.⁸

To get an idea of the effect the speech could have on Russian foreign policy discourses, one has only to recall that shortly in the wake of Putin's rhetorical demarche in Munich Russian political experts characterized it as "the starting point of Moscow's sovereign foreign policy."⁹

⁷ V. Putin. 2007. Vystupleniye i diskusiya na Myunkhenskoy konferentsii po voprosam politiki bezopasnosti [Speech and discussion at the Munich Security Conference]. President of Russia, February 10, 2007. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/02/10/1737_type63374type63376type63377type63381type82634_118097.shtml. Accessed December 10, 2014.

⁸ Vstrecha s uchastnikami mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba 'Valdai' [Meeting with members of the Valdai International Discussion Club]. President of Russia, September 14, 2007. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/09/14/2105_type63376type63381type82634_144011.shtml. Accessed December 19, 2014.

⁹ Voronin, Anatoly. 2007. Ot Munkhena do Vladivostoka [From Munich to Vladivostok]. *Strategy of Russia* 8 (August 2007).

It so happens, that in the year of the Munich speech the founding agreements for the Eurasian Customs Union were also signed, opening a new stage in the development of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc) (Dragneva 2013, p. 37). And while the discourse on building a Eurasian Union did not gain full momentum until Putin's 2011 seminal article, it is important to understand its original context, i.e., the ever-growing emphasis on Russia's international status, as well as the deepening counterhegemonic concern made explicit by the Munich speech.

Unsurprisingly then, the discourse on Eurasian integration has often combined two aspects: a depoliticized language of global economic governance and mutually beneficial regional economic integration, and a strong preoccupation with the highly politicizing themes of geopolitics, polarity and Russia's "sovereign" role in global affairs. Therefore, notwithstanding its depoliticized façade, it came to harbor a pronouncedly identitarian agenda, even if it was typically vested in economic and technocratic language.

Dragneva and Wolczuk observe in their study that "the ECU [Eurasian Customs Union] has been presented not in terms of past-oriented discourses about shared values and history, but one that offers a future-oriented modernization agenda and tangible economic benefits" (2013, p. 13). This is only true as far as Putin's seminal 2011 article on Eurasian integration is concerned, for example. However, a broader sampling of foreign policy discourses reveals an ambiguity. While economic pragmatism may be the starting point for the discourse, the discursive construct of a Eurasian economic region becomes filled rather quickly with highly politicized agendas.

Thus, the detachment from past-oriented foreign policy visions does not seem to be so straightforward. Putin describes the Eurasian Customs Union and the single economic space as the "most important geopolitical and integrational event in the post-Soviet space since the collapse of the Soviet Union."¹⁰ Reference to the USSR as an implied benchmark gains additional meaning in context of Putin's often-cited

¹⁰ Stenogramma otcheta Vladimira Putina v Gosdume [Transcript of Vladimir Putin's report to the State Duma]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, April 11, 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/printable/2012/04/11/putin-duma.html>. Accessed December 19, 2014.

observation about the USSR's collapse as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.¹¹

The usage of "geopolitics" and "geopolitical" in official Russian discourse does not usually imply systematic adherence to a specific doctrine, such as the teachings of Kjellen or Mackinder. Rather, it signals a more general tendency to think in terms of big spaces and their importance for Russia's international status and its place in the world, or, as Laruelle puts it, "the idea, common in Russia, that the destiny of the country is linked to its geographical scope." Discourses on Russia's spatiality are "metanarratives" that "advance a supposedly comprehensive and teleological explanation of Russia through a master idea—territorial size and location in space are the drivers of Russia's mission in the world, and of the nature of Russia's state and culture" (Laruelle 2012, pp. 557–558).

An important role in this is played by significant Others that are also often expressed in spatial terms. One recurrent trope, which is also naturally congruent with the notion of Eurasia, is of Russia being situated *between* the "East" and the "West." Hence, the image of Russia as a "bridge" combining or bringing together the two opposites. But alongside that, an intention also exists to imagine Russia as a spatiality that is distinct from both of its geographical others. It can be found in the words of Putin, rebuking the idea that "Russia should or must play a role of some bridge between West and East. Russia is no bridge. It is an independent, self-sufficient power in the world, and not just a link in the chain. There are of course elements of a Eurasian character in it. They are additional factors of our competitiveness, and we will of course make use of that. This is why we raise the issue of creating the Eurasian Union."

¹¹ In his 2005 address to the Council of the Federation, Putin pointed out that modern Russian history began with the USSR's collapse, which has to be recognized as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century." "For the Russian people it became a real drama. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russia's territory. The epidemic of disintegration spread to Russia itself" (Poslaniye Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia, April 25, 2005. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml. Accessed December 18, 2014).

In line with these more general “metanarratives,” Eurasian integration is then discursively constructed as an opportunity to confirm this status vis-à-vis its spatially expressed global Others. As Putin said, “Eurasian integration is a chance for the post-Soviet space to be an independent center of global development, and not a periphery for Europe or Asia.”¹² This dimension predominates rather strongly over depoliticized economic pragmatism as can be seen in policy discussions of the ruling party members organized by the Center for Social and Conservative Policy (CSCP) in 2007–2013. Irina Yarovaya, for example, speaks of “creating a new economic space and a new geopolitical space” with the Eurasian Union being “a confirmation that Russia is not only restoring its historical ties, not only strengthening its economic basis, Russia today is on the way to restoring its geopolitical status, which is connected by friendly relations with peoples that are close to us historically, spiritually, by blood.”¹³ Sergei Markov, in turn, suggests that Russia’s capability as an independent actor in the “multipolar” world hinges on securing a larger Eurasian common market: “Russia has to achieve some kind of self-sufficiency for it to develop. A market of 150 million is not enough.” The theme of economically (re)integrating the post-Soviet space in order to secure international status is a repeated one and tends to be framed as an urgent, nonnegligible task:

Today’s world is dominated by tendencies of state integration, above all economic integration. The laws of macroeconomics are stimulating an ever closer integration of the European Union. [...] Integrational groupings can be more influential parties in the global economic process than individual states, even if those are relatively large. The same laws are valid for the post-Soviet space.

¹² Zasedaniye mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba ‘Valdai’ [Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club]. President of Russia, September 19, 2013. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>. Accessed December 10, 2014.

¹³ CSKP: Stenogramma ‘kruglogo stola’ fraktsii ‘Edinaya Rossiya’ na temu: ‘Otchet Pravitel’sstva v Gosudarstvennoy Dume, zakonodatel’nye priorityty parlamenta [CSCP: Transcript of the “United Russia” fraction “round table” entitled: “Report from the Government of the Russian Federation to the State Duma, legislative priorities of the Parliament”]. CSCP, April 12, 2012. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11497/>. Accessed December 5, 2014.

[...] If we are not able to unite around ourselves the post-Soviet space, we will have to say farewell not only to the status of a great power, but also to that of a regional power. And [they] will not allow Russia to exist as an ordinary European power. Our vast lands and our natural resource wealth are being looked at with envy by the quickly growing China and by the European Union, in dire need of energy and other resources.¹⁴

Notably then, the concern about economically defined global status can further mutate into conspiracy theory-style perceptions of an implied threat.

Sampling the elite discourses shows plenty of semantic connections between economic integration and the tropes of *status*, *independence* or *sovereignty*, generally understood as Russia's capacity to be a significant actor in the "multipolar" world. They can sometimes be expressed in spatial terms, stressing the size and geographical scope of the enterprise, such as "big country [bolshaya strana]."¹⁵ Overlapping with civilizational discourses can also happen as the theme of Russia's exceptionality is developed. As Yurii Shuvalov, for example, proclaimed during a 2011 CSKP discussion, the Eurasian "strategic vector" was "dominating" Russia's development, as it was key to making it a "country of civilizational nature [strana civilizatsionnogo haraktera]."¹⁶

¹⁴ Pavel Borodin interview published in *Izvestia* in 2008: Novye gorizonty Sodruzhestva [Commonwealth's new horizons]. *Izvestia*, October 30, 2008. <http://izvestia.ru/news/342310>. Accessed December 2, 2014. Borodin was secretary of the Union State of Russia and Belarus.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, the title for a 2011 roundtable in the Council of the Federation following up immediately on Putin's seminal article and attended by prominent ruling party and expert establishment members: "Big Country: The Prospects for Integration Processes in the Post-Soviet Space in the Framework of a 'Eurasian Union.'" (Yevgeny Primakov nazval usloviya dlya uspekha Evraziyskogo soyuza [Yevgeny Primakov defined conditions for the Eurasian Union success]. *Izvestia*, November 24, 2011. <http://izvestia.ru/news/507752>. Accessed December 3, 2014).

¹⁶ CSKP: Stenogramma konferentsii na temy: 'Razvitiye cherez integratsiyu. Rossiyskiy proekt dlya Evrazii' [CSCP: Transcript of the conference on "Development through integration. Russian project for Eurasia"]. CSCP, October 28, 2011. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11360/>. Accessed December 16, 2014.

Consequently, the agenda of Eurasian integration becomes discursively linked to the themes of Russia's national "idea" (the latter having been an established trope at least since the nineteenth century) or "mission." In 2012 Tatyana Valovaya, minister to the Eurasian Economic Commission, suggested straightforwardly that Eurasian integration bore the potential of contributing to the formation of the "national idea" as the unifying agenda that reconciles different forces across the political spectrum.¹⁷ Likewise, the 2013 All-Russia People's Front, a social movement created and presided over by Putin, issued a manifesto that, among other objectives, listed fulfilling "the historical mission of Russia as the integrational center of the Eurasian space."¹⁸

In the official discourses of Eurasian regionalism, Russia's national identity and its global messianic exceptionality tend to form a tight nexus. Consider the reflections of Vladimir Medinsky, minister of culture and a prominent United Russia functionary, presented at a CSKP discussion in 2011.¹⁹ Medinsky portrayed Eurasian integration as a form of state messianism that returns a sense of higher meaning to a society that has lost itself in consumption:

What is to be done? We are looking for a national idea. [...] The main difference between United Russia and other parties is that it understands at least how we should live and what we should do. But, unfortunately, neither we nor anyone else formulates the issue clearly. Why are we doing that? What is the goal? To buy another new VCR? To drink more beer every night as we earn

¹⁷ Tatyana Valovaya in an interview published in *Izvestia* in 2012: 'Integratsiya ob' yedinyayet vsekh – ot kommunistov do 'Edinoy Rossii' i pravyykh' [Integration unites all – from communists to 'United Russia' and the right-wing]. *Izvestia*, July 9, 2012. <http://izvestia.ru/news/529688#ixzz3bILrIjb6>. Accessed December 14, 2014.

¹⁸ Manifest dvizheniya 'Narodny front za Rossiyu' [Manifesto of All-Russia people's front movement]. *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, June 12, 2013. <http://www.rg.ru/2013/06/12/manifest-onf-anons.html>. Accessed December 14, 2014.

¹⁹ CSKP: Stenogramma zasedaniya na temu: 'Uroki referenduma 1991 goda 'O sohranении SSSR' [CSCP: Transcript of the meeting entitled: "Lessons learnt from the 1991 referendum on maintaining the USSR"]. March 17, 2011. CSCP. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/10845/>. Accessed December 14, 2014.

more? Why? What is the mission of the state? [...] Why can't the global idea, the global mission of our country, be—perhaps for the next forty years (and not [just] three to four years)—a restoration of our country? On the basis of a normal economic model, normal motivation, commonality of interests. Just as we see it with the EurAsEc [Eurasian Economic Community] being built now. We pay little attention to that process, but this is a wildly positive process. Gradually—and here it is, our national idea—uniting the people again, together, in one country.

Medinsky ties Russia's exceptionality to possessing a "macro task [makrozadacha]":

There is one thing that has always made our country and our civilization different from its neighbors. It is the fact that Russia has always been a country with a macrotask, throughout its thousand years. Be it fighting the [Mongol] yoke, protecting the true faith, Russia as the Third Rome, Russia as unifier and protector of the Slavs, Russia as builder of a new society, the Communist tomorrow, Russia as a pioneer in space. When we are told that our national idea is to move from the fourth to the second place in the European soccer cup, I think that this national idea is not worthy of a country that is heir to Russian civilization. This is why our leaders have for ten years been trying to gradually restore the post-Soviet space through economics. The first steps have been taken: the EurAsEc, the tripartite Customs Union. [...] [This is leading to] a gradual economic restoration of our state. Can't we make this our macrotask?²⁰

There is, thus, a tension between the depoliticized language, which Eurasian economic regionalism draws on, on the one hand, and the propensity toward politicization, whether implicit or explicit, that brings in

²⁰ CSKP: Stenogramma konferentsii na temu: 'Itogi desyatiletii. Trayektoriya razvitiya', Sektsiya 1 [CSCP: Transcript of the conference on "The achievements of the Decade. The development path," Section 1]. CSCP, September 19, 2011. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11325/>. Accessed December 14, 2014.

the agendas of sovereignty, geopolitics or the national idea. To a considerable extent this politicization owes a debt to the social context of articulation, defined by the new emphasis on multipolarity in Russia's post-Munich foreign policy discourses. But it also importantly correlates with Russia's domestic political cycle, namely, the fact that Putin's seminal *Izvestia* article in 2011 was synchronized with the announcement of his plans to run for his third term in office. This naturally made his Eurasian "pet project" (Morozov 2013b, p. 20) an important source of political capital. Furthermore, more than one author has suggested that political considerations trumped the logic of economics in Russia's decision-making on Eurasian integration. Thus, Fean, for example, based on his interviews with Russian economic experts, argued in 2012 that "Putin's ambition to see a Eurasian Union grow out of the Customs Union highlights the geopolitical aspects of this project. Moreover, the project was launched without supporting economic analysis." According to him, this falls in the existing trend of "decisions on Russia's foreign economic policy" being "more political than economic" (Fean 2012, pp. 10–12). Vymyatnina and Antonova make a similar observation in their study of the economics of Eurasian integration:

Unlike the experience of the European Union (EU) where economic integration, though going hand in hand with political rhetoric and considerations, was guided by certain economic criteria the countries joining in had to fulfill, the CEA [Common Economic Area] is created on the basis of the Customs Union without any threshold values of economic indicators that participating countries have to satisfy and, apparently, without serious economic analysis of the situations of the union's members, their real interdependencies, differences and similarities, which might result in severe problems in the future. (2014, p. 6)

Eurasian integration: Between a transcontinental neoliberal space and identity building

Estimating the relative weight of "political considerations" and "economic analysis" in decision-making on regional integration can be conceptually and methodologically tricky. In that sense Eurasian integra-

tion is not at all an exception. The analytical dilemma evokes Hurrell's idea about regionalisms generally concealing a multiplicity of agendas behind the "public face" of the economy. But even if the political cannot be fully abstracted from the economic in any comprehensive analysis, politicization and depoliticization can still be treated as separate discursive strategies. In other words, they can be seen as two ways toward socially constructing a regional integration project, each emphasizing a certain set of its aspects and downplaying others.

Here I follow up on Makarychev's conceptual distinction of politicization and depoliticization as "two different yet equally important international strategies of Russia's officialdom." Politicization refers to "the expansion of the freedom of choice in a situation of conflicting alternatives that the international political scene offers to its actors." It is "conditioned by sovereignty and emboldens a state's subjectivity, i.e., its ability to act (or vice versa, to choose to refrain from acting) based on its own understanding of interests and enforced by political will. Depoliticization, on the other hand, connotes acting within more or less established frameworks of legal, economic or managerial rationales and taking institutional commitments that constrain the freedom of choice." Furthermore, depoliticization "can be viewed as one of the effects of global neoliberalism bound to the idea of the 'end of politics' and based on the instruments that prevent political momentum from developing" (Makarychev 2013a, pp. 77–78).

This conceptual distinction is helpful not only in terms of analyzing specifically Russian foreign policy discourses, but also because it links the depoliticizing strategy to the general neoliberal view on world politics. A basic assumption of neoliberalism is that the existing multiplicity of interests can be reconciled in a number of positive-sum games. Reconciling heterogeneous interests is more of a technical question than a question of political struggles. That strongly reduces the necessity for conflict, and the premium placed on "sovereignty" and "subjectivity" as the states' ability to stand up for what it sees as its "interests." The absence of ideological alternatives to neoliberalism further diminishes heterogeneity. The depoliticized neoliberal view on the world is one of a largely homogenized global space, where cooperation is the natural form of behavior, where interests are essentially shared and positive-sum games should prevail over zero-sum game and conflictual types of situations.

This depoliticized, neoliberal image of global space is opposite to how competing discourses such as geopolitics, political realism or civilizationism construct their spatialities. In realist terms, for example, the space cannot be homogenous but remains thoroughly heterogenous, because in “cultures of anarchy” (Wendt 1999) zero-sum games prevail and the actors’ interests are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile. In civilizational discourses the global space owes its inherent heterogeneities to the “diacriticon” of culture and religion. In geopolitics geography itself often generates insurmountable political and cultural differences.

The discourse of Eurasian regionalism hinges on the production of spatialities. As I already pointed out, the notion of Eurasia first surfaces in the post–Cold War Russian discourse as part of the attempt to formulate a regional identity devoid of Communist ideology in Sakharov’s constitutional project of a European-Asiatic Union. Previously, ideology both held together the Soviet republics as part of one global enterprise and distinguished them from their Western other. Serving as a new common denominator, geography here, in effect, occupies the empty seat of ideology as the diacriticon, that is, the “boundary marker of identity” (Neumann 1999, p. 4). In its subsequent developments, the idea of a Eurasian economic integration hinges on geographical notions, while otherwise adhering to universalist neoliberal models, such as the doctrine of building European and Eurasian “common markets” that underpins CIS-originating regionalisms ideologically.

In a depoliticized discourse of economic regionalism, the spatial notion of Eurasia is thus the only remaining token of difference, persisting in an otherwise ideologically homogenized neoliberal global space. This is what distinguishes economic Eurasianism from Eurasianism understood as a civilizational or romantic imperialist ideology. Vinokurov and Libman point out in their evaluation of the “three concepts of Eurasia” that this geographical designation can even be viewed as residual:

Strictly speaking, the “post-Soviet Eurasia” is, unlike another concept of Eurasia, which we are going to present below, free from any ideological connotations. It is merely a designation of a particular region, chosen for the lack of better words to describe it. However, it still relies on a debatable assumption: it claims

that the post-Soviet space is going to stay a relatively interconnected entity and that the countries comprising this region will be relatively comparable to each other. Whether this is indeed the case is debatable. (Vinokurov and Libman 2012, p. 83)

Serving as an expert for the Eurasian Development Bank, Vinokurov himself is a proponent of what he calls "Pragmatic Eurasianism"—as distinguished from Eurasianism as a set of Russian anti-Western ideologies. "Pragmatic Eurasianism" is conceived as an open regionalism model that encourages an economically motivated integration with all actors on the Eurasian continent, including the European Union and Asian economies.

Pragmatic Eurasianism (as an overarching approach to integration to be employed by the SES members) is based on the understanding that integration is not an end in itself, but a tool for resolving the pressing problems of the states involved, whose first priority today is economic modernization. It is aimed at ensuring successful bottom-up integration—the free flow of goods, services, labour and capital—to guarantee the long-term stability and success of this integration project. This is a project and ideology of open regionalism, with regional governments eschewing insularity for an understanding of the necessity of integration with continental partners, both to the East and the West. There should be no place for a tendency to recreate the Soviet economic space under a different name. (Vinokurov and Libman 2012, p. 17)

The ideology that Vinokurov proposes is largely congruent with the neoliberal image of international space. So is, in principle, the idea of open regionalism as an arrangement that helps countries to best integrate themselves into the global economic flows by transgressing borders and creating ever broader zones of mutually beneficial cooperation. Arguably, though, it contradicts in several points the actual practice of Eurasian regional integration, such as the creation of a customs union. Creating a customs union can be seen as barrier raising, as a set of protectionist measures vis-à-vis external economic actors.

However, the key difference probably lies in Vinokurov's idea of "bottom-up" integration—as opposed to elite-driven, top-down "pet

projects.” Bottom-up pragmatic regionalism versus top-down politicizing and geopolitical approaches is one possible analytical distinction. But it is also true that the political establishment can likewise draw on the language of economic pragmatism and try to construct open, depoliticized spaces as a matter of articulating their own political projects.

This is only true of the official discourse on Eurasian regionalism. It embeds Russia’s geopolitical project in a depoliticized, economic vocabulary which is plugged into the hegemonic neoliberal model of global economic governance. Larner and Walters conceptualize economic regionalism as a form of Foucauldian governmentality that defines its key subjects in terms of universalist liberal economic ideologies: “Regionalism constructs the reforming process, the liberalization of flows and the removal of barriers as the political and ethical choice of nation-states. These states become willing members of international economic communities and active subjects of liberalization” (Larner and Walters 2002, p. 418). Neoliberal economic regionalism is thus a form of governing “at a distance” that—unlike direct imperial domination—opts to preserve the essential architecture of national sovereignty formally intact.

This corresponds to the discursive strategies of Eurasian economic regionalism as seen from recurrent claims that Eurasian integration does not infringe on its participants’ sovereignty. As Putin reassured:

The Customs Union, and the single economic space, these are integrational associations of a completely different class, a different level and different depth. It is not restoring the Soviet Union, it is preserving, fully and entirely, the independence of these states, political independence, but with the aim of increasing our competitiveness in the global economy, giving new impetus to development, securing higher living standards for our citizens.²¹

Future-oriented and modern depoliticized economic regionalism renounces difficult legacies and vows to rebuild relationships on a new and

²¹ Putin, Vladimir. 2011. Novy integratsionny proekt dlya Evrazii—budushcheye, kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya [A new integration project for Eurasia—the future being born today]. *Izvestia*, October 3. <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>. Accessed September 30, 2014.

"civilized" basis, exercising the power of attraction rather than coercion. Tatyana Valovaya, minister to the Eurasian Economic Commission, also advocated this approach: "I often say that this whole integration depends strongly on Russia. When we behave ourselves like on August 19, 1991 [a reference to the anti-Gorbachev coup d'état], and scare everyone around us, everyone runs from us. When we demonstrate that we are a civilized state with normal, civilized, integration intentions, we can be a center of integration."²²

Prior to the inauguration of the Eurasian Economic Commission Valovaya worked as part of the large team of Russian experts preparing *Strategy 2020*. The *Strategy* was a comprehensive national development concept, commissioned by the Russian government in 2011. As part of the policy advice on the external dimension of development, the *Strategy* suggested further pragmatizing and depoliticizing Eurasian integration, "transferring the integrational process from a predominantly political to a predominantly economic, organizational-legal one, converting it into a sustainable international project that is clear and attractive to the entrepreneurs and the population in the participant states" (Mau and Kuzminova 2013, pp. 373–374). The same section, coauthored by Valovaya, also sees no alternative to gradually broadening the geographical scope of integration to its continental limits (ibid., p. 377). As part of their policy advice, the expert group viewed it as:

politically and economically unacceptable for Russia in present conditions to renounce integration or to allow it to stagnate (by entrenching around the landmarks we already achieved) within the limits of the Customs Union and the single economic space or the Commonwealth of Independent States as a whole. In light of that the expert group has worked on one scenario: creation of a great Eurasian economic space [bolshoye evraziyskoye ekonomicheskoye prostranstvo] from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Points of bifurcation in this scenario have to do with the specific formats, the

²² Stenogramma zasedaniya EG 21 po dorabotke 'Strategii-2020' v RIA 'Novosti', June 1, 2011 [Transcript of the Expert Group 21 meeting on finalizing "Strategy-2020" at RIA "Novosti," June 1, 2011]. *Strategy 2020*, June 22, 2011. http://strategy2020.rian.ru/g21_events/20110622/366093571.html. Accessed December 18, 2014.

stages of deepening and broadening the integration, including developing a relationship with the European Union, as well as the set of stimuli, that will determine the price of integration for Russia.²³

The ultimate integration goal postulated by the expert group thus lies in “forming a common Eurasian economic space with the participation of the EU, EFTA, and, perhaps, other interested states.” This was to be a “Greater Europe—from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean or Broader Eurasia—from Vladivostok to Lisbon.”²⁴ Importantly, the different spatial dimensions of continental integration are understood here as complimentary, not mutually exclusive. Russia’s “optimal strategy” lies in simultaneously developing three economic partnership frameworks: the Customs Union and the single economic space, cooperation with the EU aiming at a “free trade area plus,” and the Asia-Pacific cooperation. It is stressed that “these dimension should not be mutually opposed” and “developing one at the expense of another is against Russia’s strategic interests.”

This pragmatic and inclusive regionalism, thus, opens various geographical dimensions as part of one larger space of continental integration. The “East” (i.e., the Asia-Pacific) enters the spatial imaginary of Eurasian regionalism alongside the “West” (the EU). Historically, the “East,” as a spatial and cultural category, has traditionally played its role in Russian identity formation. Its importance cannot be compared to the “West” or “Europe,” which functioned as the principle constitutive Other. Furthermore, the “East” has rarely had an independent existence, but was typically a binary that became activated in context of Russia’s already existing relationship with the “West.” In terms of the more contemporary foreign policy doctrines the “East” entered the Russian geopolitical imagination with Primakov’s geographical diversification of foreign policy priorities and the shift toward multipolarity in the 1990s (Lo 2002). Yet, Russia’s pivot to Asia is also an established

²³ *Kratkaya versiya analiticheskogo doklada Gruppy 21* [Short version of Group 21 analytical report]. Strategy 2020. <http://strategy2020.rian.ru/load/366095228>. Accessed December 18, 2014.

²⁴ *Kratkaya versiya analiticheskogo doklada Gruppy 21* [Short version of Group 21 analytical report]. Strategy 2020. <http://strategy2020.rian.ru/load/366095228>. Accessed December 18, 2014.

theme since at least the nineteenth century. An often quoted excerpt from Dostoyevsky's *Diary of a Writer* makes "use" of the Eastern Other to reassert Russia's European status as a civilizing power:

In Europe we were spongers and slaves, to Asia we will come as masters. In Europe we were Tatars, in Asia we are also Europeans [i my evropeysli]. Our mission, our civilizing mission will seduce our spirit and will carry us there, if only the movement started. Build just two railroads, start by that, one to Siberia, another to Central Asia, and immediately you will see the consequences. (Dostoyevsky 1995, p. 509)

In the late nineteenth century the Russian Slavist and geographer Lamansky anticipated many of the ideas that the civilizational Eurasianist philosophers later elaborated. His geopolitical study *The Three Worlds of the Asian-European Continent* starts by decentering or diminishing Europe symbolically through characterizing Europe as a "peninsula" of Asia (1892, p. 1). Lamansky goes on to elaborate the idea of Russia as a "middle world [sredniy mir]" belonging neither fully to Europe nor to Asia but combining the best of two worlds. Also, in Lamansky's geographical imagination the so-called "Russian Asia" is distinct from "non-Russian" as having a greater potential, providing a geographical space for millions of future Russians to populate. Here, as with Dostoyevsky's *mission civilisatrice*, one can clearly see elements of European colonial thinking.

Not surprisingly the kick-off volume of the interwar émigré Eurasianist philosophers also bore the title *Exodus to the East*. The specter of the "East" has thus been haunting the Russian self-reflections for quite some time. The strategies have been quite common of diluting Russia's established identitary dependence on the "West" by including the 'East' as a spatial and cultural "alternative" or a counterbalance.²⁵

²⁵ Yet, despite those efforts the "West" seems to have largely remained a constitutive reference point and an object of primary attention. As Lo argues, Primakov's famous recalibration of the Russian foreign policy doctrine toward a geographically more balanced multipolarity was not substantially reflected by the foreign policy practice. "Despite Primakov's apparent commitment to a multipolar world, he dealt almost exclusively with Washington

Parallel strategies can be observed in the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism, thus suggesting that the inherent grammar of this discourse follows the old patterns of identity formation.

“Pragmatic” or “open” Eurasianism introduces the Eastern dimension to broaden Russia’s spatial self-imagination. At the same time, it works to depoliticize the broader Eurasian space. It is imagined as one large homogenous space of complimentary and mutually beneficial integrations, and not of conflict bearing geopolitical oppositions. In geopolitical visions of the Russian rulers it is also linked discursively to Russia’s own domestic “East” as the country’s geographical and cultural attribute, as claimed by President Medvedev during a 2008 meeting of the Valdai Club:

We often use the term “Euroasiatic country” to describe Russia, but do not think of its practical implications. [...] In truth Russia is really a state that faces Europe with one side but with large parts lying in the Asian region. [...] We understand now that if we do not move on to the East our economy has no future for several reasons. First of all, if we do not move toward the East, our Eastern regions will not develop as we would like them to. The country is vast, the population density is small. [...] We have created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, we participate in the APEC forum and we consider that to be one of our priorities.

in the belief that only the USA could shape developments” (Lo 2002, p. 24). There are indications that Eurasian integration has been following largely the same pattern. Fyodor Lukyanov, a top Russian foreign policy expert, complained rather tellingly after a joint Russian-Chinese policy seminar in 2013, that while Russia let itself be carried away by the struggle with the West over Ukraine, the Asian flank had been practically ignored. “In China they are greeting the fact that Moscow, at least on the level of the project’s name, turned its attention to this dimension. But they do not understand, whether this is serious, and more importantly, what is really Eurasian about Vladimir Putin’s idea. So far, from Shanghai and Beijing it looks like Russia, while speculating much about Siberia, the Far East, the Asia-Pacific region in general, does not propose or do anything concrete and engages in its favorite hobby: squeezing the European Union out of the Western CIS” (Fyodor Lukyanov. *Evrasiyskaya integratsiya ne po-nashemu* [Eurasian integration: another way]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, November 20, 2013. <http://www.rg.ru/2013/11/20/lukjanov.html>. Accessed December 20, 2014).

There is no opposition here between, let us say, the Asian vector and the European. Russia has such a history that the Russian cultural identity formed on the European basis. But at the same time if one were to speak of more ancient history, of certain everyday things, there is much that relates us specifically to the states of the Asian region. [...] This is why I think this is an exceptionally promising line of development, and we will, of course, continue it. But not at the expense of our relations with Europe, not at the expense of relations with the Western world. This is where the polycentric element, multipolarity should be manifested.²⁶

Thus, the discourse of pragmatic Eurasianism imagines the "broader Eurasia [shirokaya Evraziya]" as a site of predominantly positive-sum games, a homogenous space filled with complimentary integration projects. This spatial image is neoliberal in its basic assumptions. Its construction owes to the universalistic assumption that Larner and Walters point out in their analysis of the global discourse of regionalism. This assumption holds that, despite "significant differences between regions," "there is a general logic to regional integration" (Larner and Walters 2002, p. 393).

The global discourse of economic regionalism is generally based on a depoliticized neoliberal logic portraying regional integration as a universal process. In Russia, certain strands of the Eurasian regionalist discourse fit very well into this logic. The Russian discourses can therefore be viewed as plugging into a globally established discourse and as importing and recycling Western neoliberal vocabularies. Thus, "pragmatic Eurasianism" constructs the neoliberal space of a "broader Eurasia" that is also linked with other neoliberal regional spaces through cooperation and mutually beneficial exchanges.

However, alongside the depoliticized logic there is also a prominent strand of discourse that emphasize the symbolic role of Eurasian integration as Russia's national idea or a grand mission, which

²⁶ Stenograficheskiy otchet o vstreche s uchastnikami mezhdunarodnogo kluba 'Valdai' [Transcript report on the meeting with members of the Valdai International Discussion Club]. President of Russia, September 12, 2008. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/09/12/1518_type63374type63376type63381type82634_206408.shtml. Accessed December 8, 2014.

has the potential to reconstitute its identity in the twenty-first century. Eurasian integration becomes politicized in a specific domestic and international context. The international context is defined by a more assertive foreign policy stance adopted by the Russian establishment. Growing aversion to what is perceived as a Western-dominated world order is coupled with distancing from the Western normative canon in domestic politics. The 1990s are interpreted as the period during which Russia was devastated and humiliated as a result of unconditionally importing Western standards in politics and economics. The new Russia on the contrary is seen as “rising from its knees,” able to resist both the global domination of the EU and the US and their perceived attempts to impose Western norms on Russian domestic life. As no grand ideological alternative to Western liberalism is yet put forth, the Russian ruling establishment must partially identify with the Western political and economic order, even though it may not be content with Russia’s current position inside it. This is where plugging into the predominantly neoliberal discourse on regionalism becomes an intuitively evident strategy. At the same time, the role of a leader of a regional economic bloc has twofold significance for the Russian establishment. It is on the one hand a statement of intent to coparticipate in the building of a global order that is still fashioned largely in accordance with the Western model. On the other hand, it is viewed as a token of that “real,” actual sovereignty that Putin speaks of. It is that kind of “sovereignty” which confirms Russia’s international status and sets limits to the global Western hegemony.

The “public face” of Eurasian regionalism thus covers a complex array of agendas that are not necessarily related to the official agenda of economic integration and have more to do with Russian perceptions of world order, Western hegemony and the Russian Self. The old self/other nexus and Russia’s identitary “relationship” with Europe persists also in this new discourse. The next chapter discusses in more detail how the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism is structured around images of European integration as its constitutive Other. I suggest this particular version of Western Other plays a central role in the social construction of a Eurasian region. As such the discourse of economic regionalism is linked to the neoliberal tropes of an open global space of cooperation. This is the kind of tropes reproduced by the discourses of “open” or “pragmatic Eurasianism.” However, the

discourse on Eurasian integration when taken in its entirety proves to be much more multifaceted and ambiguous. As the next chapter is to demonstrate, this discourse gives various reading to the European experience and oftentimes follows the strategy of partial rather than complete identification. Liberal and technocratic in its foundations, this discourse also produces difference and various borders between Europe and Eurasia, thus repeating the complicated pattern of the identity "relationship."

CHAPTER 7

Eurasian Regionalism and the European Union: New Uses for the Old Other

This chapter examines the role played by images of European integration in the discourse of Eurasian regionalism. The central argument is that European integration functions as the constitutive Other in this discourse. Different interpretations of the European experience are pivotal to the narratives on Eurasian integration constructed by proponents of economic Eurasianism. These interpretations are not stable. Rather, they form a changing spectrum, in many ways reminiscent of the traditional interplay of ambiguous and complex attitudes articulated in Russia as regards the “West.” The chapter demonstrates in detail how the discursive nexus between images of European and Eurasian integration repeats these historically known patterns to reconstitute Russian identity, this time through a discourse on economic regionalism.

One implication of this approach is that images of European integration and the discourse of Eurasian regionalism function as proxies for the more broadly understood Western Other. On the other hand, European integration does not enjoy a privileged position only in the Russian geopolitical imagination. In general, it is also an important staple in the global discourse on regionalism. And while Eurocentrism is indeed a persisting Russian feature, othering the European Union is far from being endemic to Russian policy discourses. As Chapter 2 suggests, the EU functions as an important nodal point in the global discourse of regionalism. Thus, for instance, the normative defini-

tions of “good” and “bad” regionalisms in Latin America can hinge on interpretations of the role that the EU has been playing on the continent. For the Russian discursive practices, othering, or providing their own images of the EU, is also another way of plugging into this globally established discourse. The previous chapter argued that Russia’s current strategy is one of partial identification, i.e., one of not rejecting yet not fully embracing the present world order. This chapter shows how the othering of European integration inscribes Eurasia into the global narrative on regionalism but at the same time constructs borders and difference inside the envisioned neoliberal space of regional integration.

The two unions: From a “universal model” toward complementarity

Attempts to justify Eurasian integration by inscribing it into universal processes are typical for Russian officials. Regional integration as a global trend is a rather frequent trope in post-Soviet discourse. In line with this, Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept adopted in 2013, declares that the “Eurasian Union” is being formed on “universal integrational principles,” “as an effective link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific” region. Similarly, Putin’s 2011 seminal article on Eurasian integration argues that the dilemma between post-Soviet integration and the “European choice” is a false alternative. “We do not mean to fence ourselves off from anyone. The Eurasian Union will be built on universal integrational principles, as an integral part of Greater Europe, united by the common values of freedom, democracy and the laws of the market.”¹

The discourse on Eurasian integration, thus, constructs a logic of complementarity, implying that Russia’s Eurasian project shares the same normative enterprise with other integration projects. Above all, this concerns the EU as the so-called gold standard of regional inte-

¹ Putin, Vladimir. 2011. Novy integratsionny proekt dlya Evrazii—budushcheye, kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya [A new integration project for Eurasia—the future being born today]. *Izvestia*, October 3. <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>. Accessed September 30, 2014.

gration. Establishment discourses portray the European and Eurasian unions as being both analogous and complimentary, involved in the same normative project of securing better continental and global economic governance. Thus, Putin's 2011 seminal article represents regional organizations as "building blocks" of the postcrisis world order:

Today it is evident that the global crisis that erupted in 2008 had a structural nature. [...] The root of the problem is in the amassed global imbalances. [...] In our opinion, there can be a solution in working out common approaches "bottom up." First, inside the established regional structures: the EU, NAFTA, APEC, ASEAN and others and then through a dialog between them. From these integrational "building blocks" a more stable mode of the global economy can form. For example, the two largest groupings on our continent—the European Union and the forming Eurasian Union are capable objectively—basing their interaction on the rules of free trade and complementarity of regulatory systems, and also through their relations with third countries and regional structures—spread these principles to the entire space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.²

Furthermore, the EU is othered not only as a partner to the "Eurasian Union," but also as a universal model, to which the latter must approximate by going through a sequence of predefined stages. Consider Tatyana Valovaya's explanation:

The classical scheme of integration, the hard option, the only one that can be called integration, is clear. It was tested by the European Union. It is the free trade area, the Customs Union, the single economic space, in due time the economic [and] monetary union, in the very long term a political union. You cannot trick this stage of integration, proceeding from stage to stage is like—I always draw my favorite parallel—it is like driving a car

² Putin, Vladimir. 2011. Novy integratsionny proekt dlya Evrazii—budushcheye, kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya [A new integration project for Eurasia—the future being born today]. *Izvestia*, October 3. <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>. Accessed September 30, 2014.

with manual transmission. You cannot switch to the fourth gear without going through the first, second and third. Otherwise it will stall.³

Elsewhere Valovaya praises the EU as “the only truly functional integrational model, taken as the benchmark in Eurasia as well as in Latin America and in other parts of the world.”⁴ The “universal model”⁵ of the EU experience has served as an ideological underpinning of Eurasian economic integration in multiple statements by Valovaya and other civil servants. “There is a logic of the process,” said an anonymous source in the Russian government in an interview concerning Eurasian integration, which was published by *Izvestia*. Or as Valovaya specified elsewhere: “In Europe, first there was the coal and steel community, then it became the customs and economic grouping, and, gradually, they arrived at the level when economics pushed in politics.”⁶ Hence, the claim that “the history of Eurasian integration is actually an attempt to build something similar to the EU” (Valovaya 2012, p. 42).

The EU has, thus, been defined as a universal yardstick against which Eurasian integration is measured. Consider, for example, this statement by Viktor Khristenko, chairman of the board of the Eurasian Economic Commission: “Regional processes of unification and integra-

³ Stenogramma zasedaniya EG 21 po dorabotke ‘Strategii-2010’ v RIA ‘Novosti’ June 1, 2011 [Transcript of the Expert Group 21 meeting on finalizing “Strategy-2020” at RIA “Novosti,” June 1, 2011]. Strategy 2020, June 22, 2011. http://strategy2020.rian.ru/g21_events/20110622/366093571.html. Accessed December 18, 2014.

⁴ An article published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in 2012: Ispytaniye integratsiyey. Kakiye oshibki Evropy nel’zya povtorit’ Evrazii [Integration challenge. Which Europe’s mistakes Eurasia should not repeat]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, September 5, 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/09/05/valovaya.html>. Accessed December 18, 2014.

⁵ “The integration will probably not limit itself to the Single Economic Space. There is a universal model of integration, it is the European Union” (an interview with a source in the Russian government published in *Izvestia* in 2011: Rossiya, Belarus i Kazakhstan sozhdut EurAsoyuz [Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan will create EurAUnion]. *Izvestia*, March 15, 2011. <http://izvestia.ru/news/372400#ixzz3RerNP6q6>. Accessed December 18, 2014).

⁶ V Moskve reshili postroit’ EurAsEC po obrazu Evrosoyuza [Moscow decided to build EurAsEC modelled on the EU]. *Izvestia*, March 19, 2012. <http://izvestia.ru/news/518989#ixzz3RfAIS9ql>. Accessed December 17, 2014.

tion of societies are on the rise today. And the most advanced form of integration is the European Union, which is also in a serious crisis. [...] And the next one, if we speak from the point of view of quality, that has been able to go on to the supranational level after the European Union is the Eurasian community.”⁷

In general, members of the Russian establishment tend to have a modest degree of acquaintance with the intricacies of European integration and the specific historical context of its origin. (Tatyana Valovaya is perhaps an exception. She gained her first-hand experience with the European communities working for the Soviet and Russian permanent missions to Brussels in 1989–1994.) Nevertheless, they tend to share the strategy of anchoring the “Eurasian Union” in the ideology of the EU as the “universal model” of regionalism.

The doctrine of the EU as a model for Eurasianism helps emphasize the complementarity of the two projects. It frames them as two integral parts of the same normative enterprise or the future “two pillars of the space from Lisbon to Vladivostok,” in the words of an anonymous government source.⁸ The Russian establishment also sought recognition of this complementarity from the EU as its counterpart-to-be. At the thirty-first EU-Russia summit, Putin called for the partnership agreement to take into account the arrival of the Eurasian project. He said he counted on the European Commission establishing direct ties with the Eurasian Economic Commission as the two integrational groupings “are built on similar principles and are fully compatible.”⁹

⁷ Khristenko in a 2012 interview to the Voice of Russia: *Edinoye ekonomicheskoye prostranstvo—eto chetyre stepeni svobody dlya grazhdan* [Single Economic Space means four freedoms for the citizens]. Voice of Russia, December 18, 2012. Available from: Russian century: A portal for Russian compatriots, founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. <http://www.ruvek.ru/?module=articles&action=view&id=7643&theme=19>. Accessed August 31, 2014.

⁸ *Rossiia, Belarus i Kazakhstan sozdatut EvrAsoyuz* [Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan will create EurAUnion]. *Izvestia*, March 15, 2011. <http://izvestia.ru/news/372400#ixzz3RerNP6q6>. Accessed December 18, 2014.

⁹ *Mosty vmesto granits. Na samite Rossiya-EU obsudili torgovye i vizovye bar'ery* [Bridges, not borders. The Russia-EU Summit discussed trade and visa barriers]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, June 5, 2013. <http://www.rg.ru/2013/06/04/sammit-site.html>. Accessed December 19, 2014.

The institutions of Eurasian economic integration were an important part of the regionalist discourse in several aspects. The newly created institutions included the Eurasian Economic Commission (active from 2012) and the Court of the Eurasian Economic Community. In 2011–2012 the Russian ruling class also speculated about a Eurasian Parliament but the idea was shelved until better times, following rather wary reaction from Russia's junior partners in integration, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The existing institutions in themselves serve as sights of discourse production, although the predominantly technical nature of their agendas makes them less valuable than Russian official discourses. However, what is perhaps more important in the context of the present analysis is the symbolic status these institutions gain in the regionalist discourse. The narrative on the universal European integration model also accommodates the institutional architecture—both existing and envisioned—as a token or a demonstration that the “Eurasian Union” is analogous to its European counterpart. As reported in *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, the mouthpiece of the Russian parliament: “Forming the Eurasian Union is a lengthy process. Ideally, there should emerge an integration structure close to the European Union. Today it is the European Union that is demonstrating the closest integration between states.”¹⁰

Into this logic falls also the discourse on a Eurasian parliament as the “natural” outcome of pursuing the European model by proceeding “from economics to politics.” In the same vein, the Eurasian Economic Commission is represented as “approximately an analog to the EU.”¹¹

Copying institutions is, thus, one of the ways to plug into the global discourse on regionalism. And copying the EU institutions in particular—however consistently or superficially—is a token of identifying with the “gold standard” of this discourse.

¹⁰ Parlamentskaya diplomatiya i integratsiya [Parliamentary diplomacy and integration]. *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, November 14, 2013. <http://www.pnp.ru/newspaper/detail/41732>. Accessed December 27, 2014.

¹¹ Interview with Deputy Minister of Economics Aleksei Likhachyov, published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in 2010: Inflyatsiya po limitu. V stranakh Tamozhennogo Soyuz a ee khotyat ogranichit' pyat'yu protsentami v god [Inflation under control. Customs Union's countries want to limit inflation to five percent annually]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, November 26, 2010. <http://www.rg.ru/2010/11/26/ekonomika.html>. Accessed December 13, 2014.

Furthermore, isomorphism of regional institutions also fits well into the discourse on European–Eurasian complementarity. As existing studies in the field of comparative regionalism demonstrate, institutional emulation can play an important role in interregional relations. Putin’s plea to establish direct institutional ties were then no less than an attempt to upload the Russia-EU relationship to a new, interregional level. Among other things, the institutionalization of Eurasian economic integration can be seen as a way of making the EU face an organizational *fait accompli*. A policy analysis by the Institute of Modern Development, a liberal-minded think tank patronized by Dmitry Medvedev, argued exactly along these lines in 2012:

The European Commission has still not warmed up to the idea of working with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EaEC). Sooner or later it will have to get used to the fact that, with regard to a part of the economic and trade issues in the Russia-EU track, Russian authorities have yielded certain sovereign competences to the EaEC. If Brussels is truly interested in a qualitative new relationship with Russia in the economic sphere, it will in the end have to cooperate with EaEC and to realize the importance not only of relations with Russia, but also of the EU–EaEC format.¹²

The ideological nature of the discourse on following the so-called EU model becomes visible when examined against the reality of practice. As Dragneva and Wolczuk observed, there were “clear limits” to Eurasian–European emulations. It is true that the EU was the “primary reference point” in the discourse of Eurasian regionalism and the narrative on emulating the EU has been “stable.” Yet, it was not immediately “reflected on the macroinstitutional design,” although over time the gap between the “narrative of EU-likeness and key markers of pooling of sovereignty and institutionalization” did become “narrowed down” (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015).

Even so, argue Dragneva and Wolczuk, the reference to the EU is important in terms of Russia’s regional construction. And even though

¹² *Analiticheskii byulleten’*, September 2012, 4 [Analytical bulletin, September 2012, 4]. Institute of Modern Development http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/INSOR_September_4.pdf. Accessed December 20, 2014.

the economic rationale for Eurasian integration may seem questionable from the point of view of the costs-and-benefits calculation, Russia never the less strives “to construct a region through institutions and procedures for economic integration” (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015).

Dragneva and Wolczuk here follow Powers and Goertz in their “basic social constructivist insight” that conceptualizes regions “as constituted by regional economic institutions”: “These important, multifunctional, regional institutions, for example, ASEAN, EU, MERCOSUR, etc., are the creations of states, not of (academic) observers. As such international regions are political constructions of states” (2011, p. 2388).

The idea of institutions as region builders correlates with the idea advocated by Larner and Walters, of the new regionalist discourse as dividing up the international space into economic regions. Here we can observe an essential ambiguity. Economic regionalism constructs the international space as homogenous and being subject to the same universal logic. Yet, it also has to draw borders in order to isolate individual regions as spatial units of its governmentality.

Consequently, the nexus that we observe between the neoliberal narrative on European integration and the imagining of a Eurasian economic area, on the other, suggests that there is an important role that the EU, or rather its constructed image, plays in the social construction of the Eurasian region. Here, one has the chance to observe a particular “use of the Other” in region building. The institutions and practices of Eurasian regionalism serve to delineate the geographical scope of its neoliberal governmentality. But recognition of their complementarity by the EU is a key element here. And, if granted at some point, it would signal the EU’s acquiescence to the definition of regional borders in Eastern Europe.

Spatial and normative decentering of European integration and the quest for equal status

A further instance of using the Other can be seen in the discursive nexus between representations of the EU and of the “four freedoms” as the neoliberal statement of faith in regional integration. Identifying with the EU thus means identifying with this hegemonic principle of

economic regionalism. Here, I in no way mean to argue that this principle is exhaustive of European integration. There is obviously much more to the EU than neoliberalism, even if the latter has been a crucial part of its experience. A neoliberal image of the EU is exactly what it is—an image. It is reproduced by various discourses, also outside of Europe, and it is an image which thus functions as a nodal point in the global discourse on regionalism. As the existing literature on comparative regionalism suggests, there seems to be a broad consensus that the EU is the “gold standard” of regional integration. This entails almost universal hailing as well as multiple signs of partial emulation. But, on the other hand, the status of a reference point rather than a comprehensive model suggests there can, in practice, be many varying, local interpretations as to what essentially the EU is about, what it is exactly that makes it the “gold standard.” In other words, there is not one but many “EUs” out there. To each regional imagination its own.

This applies also to the discourse of Eurasian regionalism. For its articulatory practices filling the “European Union” with their own meanings is central to stabilizing and legitimizing the discourse. Obviously, othering the EU as a neoliberal enterprise and a universal model that includes predefined stages of political and economic integration, abstracts from many of its key experiences. This includes *inter alia* the European social policies, the fundamental importance of human rights to the European project or the specific historical context of the origins of European communities. Notably, all these are themes on which the Eurasianist narrative chose to remain largely silent.

Therefore, Eurasianist practices of “othering” the EU are simultaneously attempts to fill a nodal point around which the Eurasian regionalist discourse is organized and stabilized. One could then argue that the spatial and ideological definitions of Eurasian regionalism hinge on narrativizations of Europe, or, more specifically, the European Union, and also on partial identification with it. By implication this means that spatial borders begin to be implicitly drawn in an otherwise homogenous space as the difference between the Self and the Other is articulated.

Arguably, this implicit drawing of regional borders—happening inside what is otherwise imagined as the shared neoliberal space of continental integration (the “Broader Eurasia”)—signals the ambiguity of Russia’s stance toward neoliberal hegemony. This stance can be conceptualized as partial identification, or—following Morozov (2013b)

in his take on Russia as “subaltern empire”—as “hybridity.” Thus, on the one, hand a Russian sphere of influence is delineated through the economic regionalist vocabulary. On the other, this same influence is to be exercised in the name of universalist ideologies, in the name of neoliberal regionalism.

The narrative of regions as “building blocks” of the world order, which is reproduced by the Russian establishment, conceals the same ambiguity. In one instance, it is a depoliticized space of global economic governance that is essentially a shared normative enterprise of securing stability and prosperity through joint efforts and responsibility. In the other, however it also accommodates the ideas of Russia’s special status. With the global space divided up into multiple decision-making centers or zones of responsibility, Russia can claim the mission to be the local center or the self-appointed warden of regional integration. In this perspective multiregionalism practically becomes a depoliticized or liberal version of the more familiar multipolarity doctrine.

Regionalism, therefore, seems to be a rather convenient discourse for hybrid stances. It both plugs into the global neoliberal discourse and helps in drawing implicit lines without rejecting the hegemonic frame altogether. Eurasian regionalism is, then, a natural vehicle for Russia’s counterhegemonic strategies. Below I demonstrate how identification with the EU as the allegedly universal model discursively mutates into one of those strategies.

Counterhegemonic strategies in the discourse of Eurasian regionalism hinge on redefining its primary nodal point. In that regard one could isolate several patterns or approaches to othering the European Union.

Firstly, there is a telling preoccupation with the status of the would-be Eurasian Union vis-à-vis its supposed counterpart. This is where alongside the trope of complementarity of the two integrations an emphasis is made on equality or parity. The relationship of parity can be defined in spatial terms as in Putin’s seminal article: “the two largest groupings on our continent—the European Union and the forming Eurasian Union.”¹³ The idea of the “broader Eurasia” can also be

¹³ From a 2010 article for *Izvestia* by Vladimir Zharikhin, political expert and deputy director of the Institute for CIS countries, which is headed by Konstantin Zatulin a State Duma member for United Russia, responsible for

used for decentering Europe in spatial terms. Thus, Sergey Naryshkin, chairman of the State Duma, claims that “European integration from the historical point of view is an integral part of Eurasian integration, as Europe is part of the Eurasian continent.”¹⁴

Andrei Klimov of United Russia, coordinator of the “European Club” and the “Eurasian Dialog” discussion platform in the Russian parliament, exploits the same trope:

We understand very well that the so-called “Greater Europe” is not the European Union or the Council of Europe, it is a great civilizational space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. The space of “Greater Europe” de facto consists of two integrational centers. One integrational center is in Brussels, and the other is inside the triangle of the countries which includes Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.¹⁵

Quite obviously, this spatial decentering strategy echoes Lamansky’s old idea about Europe as a mere “peninsula” of Asia. Spatial decentering is paralleled by recognition claims and emphasis on parity. Tatyana Valovaya, while stressing that there is nothing anti-European in Eurasian integration, insists that “the Europeans should recognize us as a geopolitical reality.”¹⁶ The concern for status is a recurrent theme. Dmitry Sablin of United Russia, deputy chair of the parliamentary committee for CIS and compatriot affairs, voices it rather characteristically:

the “compatriot” agenda (2008–2011): Integratsiya s usloviyami [Conditional integration]. *Izvestia* <http://izvestia.ru/news/363998#ixzz3Rebid4t4>. Accessed December 10, 2014.

¹⁴ Naryshkin: Evraziyskiy Soyuz prizvan igrat’ klyuchevuyu rol’ v mirovoy politike [Eurasian Union has a key role to play in world politics]. Voice of Russia, June 12, 2013. Available from: CIS Executive Committee. <http://cis.minsk.by/page.php?id=180>. Accessed August 31, 2014.

¹⁵ Andrei Klimov: Evraziyskogo soyuza, v otlichie ot Evropeyskogo Soyuz, poka net, eto tol’ko ideya [In contrast to the EU, the Eurasian Union does not exist yet, it is just an idea]. Voice of Russia, May 21 2012. http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012_05_21/75477604/. Accessed August 23, 2013.

¹⁶ Integratsiya ob”yedinyayet vsekh—ot kommunistov do ‘Edinoy Rossii’ i pravyykh’ [Integration unites all—from communists to “United Russia” and the right-wing]. *Izvestia*, July 9, 2012. <http://izvestia.ru/news/529688>. Accessed December 1, 2014.

By imperial ambitions we have meant something that has traditionally existed since the Roman Empire. It is about annexing more and more territory, development, an aggressive policy, including military policy. Today, we are talking about something different. Working as part of the Customs Union we, ourselves, will become richer. And then we will talk to Europe not as a raw materials appendage or poor relation but as equals [na ravnyh].¹⁷

Note that both alternatives that Sablin lists, the “raw materials appendage [syryevoy pridatok]” and “poor relation [bednyi rodstvennik],” have a highly pejorative meaning in Russian, apparently emphasizing the depth of the concern. This affirmation of status also correlates with a concern about the perceived exclusion from the global and regional orders and the simultaneous drawing of “dividing lines [razdelitel’nyie linii].”¹⁸ Thus, Russia’s 2013 Foreign Policy Concept promotes “unity without dividing lines” in the “Euro-Atlantic region.” The preceding 2008 Foreign Policy Concept likewise complained that “integrational processes, in particular, in the Euro-Atlantic region often bear a selective and limiting nature [izbiratel’no-ogranichitel’nyi harakter].”¹⁹

However, concerns about status, recognition and inclusion do not necessarily entail rejecting the normative assumptions associated with the “universal model” of regional integration. Instead, a counterhegemonic strategy is activated, i.e., one of wrestling from the European Other its monopoly on the shared normative enterprise. This entails

¹⁷ Rossiya, Belarus i Kazakhstan pytayutsya sozdat’ novy SSSR [Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan attempt to create a new USSR]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, June 15, 2012. <http://www.msk.kp.ru/radio/stenography/35692/>. Accessed December 20, 2014.

¹⁸ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V. Putiny 12 February 2013 [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation on February 12, 2013]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 18, 2013. http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D-84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F. Accessed December 28, 2015.

¹⁹ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation]. President of Russia, July 15, 2008. <http://news.kremlin.ru/acts/785>. Accessed December 28, 2014.

a series of otherings of European integration that emphasize rather its downsides, difficulties or defects en route to implementing the “universal model.”

These otherings are often associated with the theme of learning from the EU. The very idea of learning or transfer of experience between European and Eurasian regional integration suggests that the two are, indeed, analogous. In order for the EU experience to be relevant and benchmarking to be valid, the two projects have to be walking down the same road of regionalism. The learning trope, thus, functions as a demonstration of similarity and complementarity and of being involved in the same normative enterprise. As Speaker of the State Duma Sergei Naryshkin put it in his 2013 address to PACE, “We are not hiding the fact that in issues of Eurasian integration we, to a great extent, refer to the European experience. We are close to the spirit of this model.”²⁰

Yet, “learning” can also a different shade of meaning. It can emphasize the negative as well as the positive aspects of the experience. Thus, Putin’s seminal article contains a note on “mistakes” that the European communities and other regional groupings made:

In their time the Europeans needed forty years to complete the journey from the European Coal and Steel Community to the full-fledged European Union. The Customs Union and the single economic space are forming at a much more dynamic pace, because the experience of the EU and other regional groupings are taken into consideration. We see their strong as well as their weak sides. And this is clearly our advantage that allows us to avoid mistakes, and to prevent the excesses of bureaucracy.²¹

²⁰ Nasha obshchaya platforma—gumanisticheskiye idealy. Vystupleniye Sergeya Naryshkina na plenarnom zasedanii parlamentskoy assamblei Soveta Evropy [Our common platform is humanitarian ideals. Address of Sergei Naryshkin at the plenary session of PACE]. *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, October 11–17, 2013.

²¹ Putin, Vladimir. 2011. Novy integratsionny proekt dlya Evrazii—budushcheye, kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya [A new integration project for Eurasia—the future being born today]. *Izvestia*, October 3. <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>. Accessed September 30, 2014.

Negative as opposed to positive learning emerges in the discourse of Eurasian regionalism as part of a narrative on the EU in *crisis*. The image of a crisis that is stalling the progress of European integration suggests that there has been some defect in implementing the EU's own "universal model." The image of a recent crisis can also be juxtaposed with the "progress" that the EU's Eurasian counterpart has made in implementing the same model. Consider Tatyana Valovaya's article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* that builds a narrative on two "integration elevators" existing side by side:

Almost exactly on the same day in Europe and in Eurasia two paramount geopolitical events took place. On December 8, 1991, in Belavezha the Soviet Union was dissolved. And literally the next day in Maastricht the creation of the European Union was announced. Indeed, "the Union is dead. Long live the Union!"

One could not help but notice the simultaneous and diametrically opposite nature of these processes. It seemed, sweeping changes had activated some "integrational elevators." And it looked like the former Soviet states would gradually reduce the degree of economic centralization, while preserving a single economic space and a common currency. All the more so since Belavezha Agreements provided for that. And that the European Union would increase its internal cohesion, and then the "Western" and the "Eastern" elevators would stop on one floor, the one most adequate to the contemporary economic reality, and then little by little—that is the key word here—would continue upward. [...]

It happened otherwise. The "post-Soviet" elevator crashed down, the "EU" elevator took upward dramatically. It was also overcrowded—in violation of all safety rules—full of passengers, including those that escaped from the other elevator.

After twenty years, the elevators are moving in opposite directions again. The "post-Soviet" elevator—seriously unburdened in the process, with only the most persistent and motivated staying on board—has started to ascend swiftly. The "EU" elevator, whether because of being overloaded or lacking proper maintenance, is about to fall into the abyss.

But the Eurasian integration participants should not be secretly celebrating, nor display hypocritical sympathy. In order

for our elevator to continue to ascend steadily, we must understand—what happened to the European elevator? Without such understanding something similar awaits us in the future, even if not in the nearest future.

Valovaya then goes on to conclude that the Europeans, having with all their experience demonstrated that integration has “universal laws [universalnyie zakonomernosti],” themselves started violating these laws recently.²²

The narrative on European integration in crisis does not defy the allegedly universal validity of its principles. But it others the EU by challenging its more recent role in implementing. It also implicitly suggests that the Eurasian project may now be even more fit to continue the mission. Nevertheless, this *translatio regiones* still envisions the two unions as part of a shared normative enterprise, anchored in the idea of a shared space of mutually beneficial economic cooperation and the predominance of positive-sum games. Borders—if drawn at some point in this primarily homogenous neoliberal space—arise as a result of actor errors and faulty conduct—not as a structurally determined necessity.

Discursively constructing a homogenous neoliberal space is part of the depoliticizing strategy in the discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism. This strategy also reproduces the universalist narrative of integration as gradually proceeding from economic and technical cooperation toward more advanced forms of political integration. This is the “economics to politics” formula. Eventual political integration is represented as a “natural” outcome of the objective “logic” of the process and, thus, itself receives a certain depoliticizing alibi. On the other hand, interfering with this allegedly objective “logic” is represented as unnecessary politicization which interrupts the natural flow of complementarity and of mutually beneficial cooperation and, instead, draws borders in the shared neoliberal space.

This kind of liberal policy discourse anchors itself in the doctrines of continental integration, of the imagined spaces of “Greater Europe”

²² Ispytaniye integratsiyey. Kakiye oshibki Evropy nel'zya povtorit' Evrazii [Integration challenge. Which Europe's mistakes Eurasia should not repeat]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, September 5, 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/09/05/valovaya.html>. Accessed December 18, 2014.

or “Broader Eurasia,” understood in Russian foreign policy documents as the “single and undivided economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.”²³ In the run-up to the 2013 Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, Igor Yurgens, director of the Institute for Modern Development and presidential adviser during Dmitry Medvedev’s term in office, observed that “the race of integrations” in the post-Soviet world had reached its “critical stage,” as positive-sum game interpretations failed to gain traction:

All reasonable politicians and experts acknowledge the potential not merely for “peaceful coexistence” but for the broadest “convergence.” The principle stance of Russia was formulated by the Foreign Minister Lavrov: “It is wrong and counterproductive” to promote the EU’s “Eastern Partnership” “in the spirit of the old logic of geopolitical zero-sum games.” “There are enough reasons to join the processes of European and Eurasian integration [...] based on mutually acceptable ways of cooperation.” The forming Eurasian Union is meant to increase competitiveness of the participant countries’ economies, particularly for the purpose of starting—“on equal, mutually beneficial and just terms”—“to form the single economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.”²⁴

The “race of integrations” or, as Dragneva and Wolczuk (2012) put it, “normative rivalry,” in the shared neighborhood yielded increasingly conflictual outcomes, that clearly contradicted the neoliberal image of a Greater Europe or Broader Eurasia united in a shared integration effort. The liberal-minded segment of the Russian policy establishment, as represented by Yurgens, reacted to that in the depoliticized style.

²³ Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V. Putinyam 12 February 2013 [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation on February 12, 2013]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 18, 2013. http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F. Accessed December 28, 2014.

²⁴ Analiticheskiy byulleten’, November 2013, 11 [Analytical bulletin, November 2013, 11]. Institute of Modern Development http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/insor_11_2013.pdf. Accessed December 1, 2014.

“We can only wish” wrote Yurgens “for the conceptualized approaches to be put to practice by every side in the dialog that is gaining increasingly conflictual overtones.”²⁵ According to him, the responsibility for resetting relations was to be shared equally by Brussels and Moscow. The Institute for Modern Development also warned that Russian decision makers may be repeating the European mistake of letting “political considerations” prevail over pragmatic approaches to regionalism. Geopolitical pressures, argued Sergei Kulik, result in

urging Ukraine insistently to join the Eurasian Union and in rushing the accession of the Central Asian states. Potentially, this destroys the balance of values and interests and leads to repeating the mistakes made by the European Union, when to favor political integration they ignored the basic economic law, which says that in order to integrate, a more or less equal level of development is necessary, otherwise the “Greek syndrome” is inevitable.²⁶

One could safely argue that as foreign policy decision-making in Russia falls increasingly under the influence of the perceptions of “geopolitical pressures” created by the alleged Russian-Western geopolitical competition, what one might call the voice of reason, that is, the moderate position of liberal-minded experts inside the Russian establishment becomes more and more marginalized. The more politicized the official rhetoric and the more conflictual the policymaking, the harder it becomes to defend depoliticized neoliberal constructs such as “Broader Europe.” Expert practice must either grow increasingly ideological in its analysis and policy advice statements, or put its own “semi-official” discursive practice at odds with the official rhetoric.

Whatever the individual choices might be in this situation, the liberals as representatives of a particular strand of discourse have played

²⁵ *Analiticheskii byulleten'*, November 2013, 11 [Analytical bulletin, November 2013, 11]. Institute of Modern Development http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/insor_11_2013.pdf. Accessed December 1, 2014.

²⁶ *Al'manakh Instituta sovremennogo razvitiya 2012–2013* [Almanac of the Institute of Modern Development 2012–2013]. Institute of Modern Development. <http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/trends201312.pdf>. Accessed December 9, 2014.

a key role in shaping Russian foreign policy discourses. Co-opted or “systemic” liberals, such as the “liberal imperialist” Chubays, Eurasian Economic Commission official Valovaya or Medvedev’s one-time advisor Yurgens, belong to the establishment. Their articulations form an important part of the official or semi-official discourse. The neoliberal view on world politics has also systematically informed master articulations, as seen from the official doctrines of continental economic regionalism or Putin’s seminal article on Eurasian integration, which relaunched the domestic debate on post-Soviet integration.

All these discourses work toward constructing a neoliberal spatiality of international politics that is, by default, homogenous and subject to a universal logic of positive-sum game cooperation. Conflicts and dividing lines—if they arise—stem from the wrong choices the actors make in misinterpreting or ignoring the universal neoliberal logic. The discourse of Eurasian integration is thus a way of plugging into the global discourse of regionalism that is itself also premised on universalist assumptions. In virtue of its symbolic status as the epitome of successful regionalism, “European integration” functions as an important nodal point of this discourse. Identifying the Eurasian project with the EU corresponds to identification with the “universal” neoliberal model of regional integration. This identification is ultimately a partial one, so the various practices of othering correspond to counterhegemonic strategies of redefining the nodal point. Therefore, these articulations of a Eurasian region as a distinct spatiality and an actor in its own right in global politics do not break away from the hegemonic ideology of regionalism, even when the Russian-Eurasian Self is juxtaposed with its European Other.

Gender geopolitics and a “Eurasia of values”: Axiological interpretations of Eurasian integration

Thus far we have looked at discursive practices that hinge on at least a partial identification of European and Eurasian integrations, which are understood as belonging to a shared normative enterprise that unfolds into a homogenous neoliberal space. As far as Eurasian economic regionalism is concerned, one could say that this modality of discourse generally prevails. Master articulations, including Putin’s seminal 2011

article, draw on the depoliticized neoliberal model of world politics. Yet there are also competing discourses that depart from this general assumption of global homogeneity. We can, therefore, describe these discourses as politicizing because they introduce difference and conflict as structural features of global space.

We agreed that politicization—as opposed to depoliticization—refers to “the expansion of the freedom of choice in a situation of conflicting alternatives that the international political scene offers to its actors.” It is “conditioned by sovereignty and emboldens a state’s subjectivity, i.e., its ability to act (or, vice versa, to choose to refrain from acting) based on its own understanding of interests and enforced by political will” (Makarychev 2013a, pp. 77–78). It thus discards the neoliberal idea that politics have ended and that actors and their interests can be reconciled within a technical or managerial rationale.

Politicizing approaches then construct heterogeneous rather than homogenous spaces. Subjectivities are constituted through difference production rather than through articulations of universality or shared normativity. Practices of othering are meant to emphasize this difference. It is true that the master articulations of Eurasian regionalism were mostly depoliticized and neoliberal ones. Nevertheless, these articulations did construct a distinct region by delineating a spatiality. Using this pretext, politicizing discourses strive to fill this spatiality with their own artifacts of difference production.

There are several politicizing discourses on Eurasian integration that can be isolated in Russia. They draw on different discursive resources to construct heterogeneity, and, consequently, produce a variety of interpretations as to the Self/Other relations. As a rule, these are discursive strategies built around culture and values. These strategies share their discursive resources with the civilizational approaches that were examined in previous chapters. This is where the agenda of Eurasian integration overlaps with agendas of a Eurasian or Russian civilization or world.

In the depoliticized discourse of economic regionalism cultural identities as such generally play a secondary role. Cultural kinship can be framed as instrumental to advancing economic integration:

The countries of the Customs Union will remain primary candidates for “deeper” formats of integrational interaction, taking

into consideration their territorial, ethnocultural and historical proximity. The creation of the Customs Union and the single economic space based on the “troika” of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan is a crucial step towards expanding the market for Russian goods and services. (Dynkin et al. 2013, p. 348)

Compatriots residing in the near-abroad can then be brought in as an asset. In 2012 the Russian State Duma adopted a declaration entitled “On Strengthening Cooperation with Compatriots Abroad on Increasing Russia’s Humanitarian Influence on the Eve of the Creation of the Eurasian Economic Union.” The Declaration assigned a special role to Russian-speaking communities abroad in building the Eurasian Economic Union:

The objective that has been set, the creation, in the nearest future, of the Eurasian Economic Union, requires this ambitious task to be supported not only by the population in the states of the Eurasian space [evraziyskoye prostranstvo], but also by the “Russian world,” our compatriots abroad. [...] The State Duma believes that the Russian language should be an effectively binding basis for the future Eurasian economic union and calls to undertake all possible efforts aimed at a qualitative increase in Russian cultural presence beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, in particular through expanding the network of Russian centers for science and culture and improving their material infrastructure.²⁷

The economic and culturalist forms of regionalism can, therefore, come to overlap in the same organizational gaze. Indeed, starting from 2011 the agendas of Eurasian integration and compatriots in the State

²⁷ ZAYAVLENIYE GOSUDARSTVENNOY DUMY Ob usilenii raboty s sootchestvennikami za rubezhom i o rasshirenii gumanitarnogo vliyaniya Rossii v preddverii sozdaniya Evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soyuza [State Duma Declaration On Strengthening Cooperation with Compatriots Abroad and on Increasing Russia’s Influence on the Eve of the Creation of the Eurasian Economic Union]. Available from: Rossotrudnichesto (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation). http://old.rs.gov.ru/sites/rs.gov.ru/files/zayavlenie_gd.pdf. Accessed December 15, 2014.

Duma were assigned to one parliamentary committee.²⁸ But the link works both ways. Not only culture can be represented as an asset in promoting economic integration goals, but also economic regionalism can have culturally informed goals that transcend the depoliticizing economization of global space.

Attempts to narrativize Eurasian integration as a project of sustaining cultural pluralism make apparent its discursive links to civilizationism. As Putin explained in his 2013 address to the Valdai Discussion Club:

The future Eurasian economic union, which we proclaimed, about which we have recently spoken much, is not just a set of mutually expedient agreements. The Eurasian Union is a project of preserving national identities [sokhraneniye identichnosti narodov] and the historical Eurasian space in the new century and in a new world. Eurasian integration is a chance for the post-Soviet space to be an independent center of global development, and not a periphery of Europe or Asia. I would like to stress that Eurasian integration will be built on the principle of diversity [mnogoobraziye]. This is a grouping in which everyone will preserve his face, his originality [samobytnost'], the status of an independent political subject [politicheskaya subjektnost'].²⁹

The mission of preserving cultural distinctness implies articulating a form of cultural pluralism. This cultural pluralism can define itself in relation to two Others. The first Other is generalized. It is a general threat of cultural assimilation. It is associated vaguely with the “West” via the notion of a Western-led globalization, which, as of today, dominates the “new world” and the “new century” and therefore endangers national identities. The second Other can also be specified in more

²⁸ Committee of the State Duma for the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots. <http://komitet.info/>. Accessed January 31, 2015.

²⁹ Zasedaniye mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba ‘Valdai’ [Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club]. President of Russia, September 19, 2013. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>. Accessed December 10, 2014.

detail as Western European multiculturalism, which in Russian discourses is typically presented as a faulty ideology.

Consider how the doctrine of Russian cultural pluralism was outlined in a 2011 report prepared by the National Institute for the Development of Contemporary Ideology, a think tank that worked for United Russia:

The basis for relations between countries in the new model of the world order should, in our opinion, not be competition which leads to conflicts, but the principles of mutual accounting for geopolitical interests. Russia could test this model in the Euro-Asiatic Union. The Eurasian space, in particular, provides a chance to show a different way of treating migrants, who are a problem which became unresolvable under the existing model of globalization. Moreover, it is a problem that became the destructive, revolutionary force that shatters and undermines the globalized world. With all its history Russia demonstrates an example of coexistence and integration of multiple cultures, creeds, lifestyles [zhiznennyye układy]. “To live together while remaining different”—this is the formula that can describe the Russian civilizational alternative to the “melting pot” and “multiculturalism,” these two alter egos of the Western project of globalization.³⁰

The faults of multiculturalism are, thus, juxtaposed to the pluralistic universalism inherent in the Russian project. The advantages of the Russian project (*rossiyskiy proekt*) as the ideological underpinning of Eurasian integration are promoted by ideologists of the United Russia conservatism very much in the spirit of the already discussed civilizational approaches. Consider, for example, this introduction provided by Yuri Shuvalov to a 2011 United Russian think tank discussion on Eurasian integration:

³⁰ *Mir cherez 20 let posle SSSR: uzhe ne odnopolyarny, eshche ne mnohopolyarny. Mesto i rol' Rossii v protsessakh formirovaniya novoho miroponyadka* [20 years after the USSR: the world is no longer unipolar, but it is not multipolar yet]. 2011. NIDCI. <http://www.nirsinirsi.appspot.com/ForeignPolicy/n140/doklad2.pdf/>. Accessed December 13, 2014.

This is an issue of integration, an issue of commonwealth with those countries that are close to us in spirit, with whom we can build a system of common values. Certainly, this will be another system of values, somehow different from the purely Russian [rossiyskiye] values. Certainly, a very important factor—and we will need to talk about that—is the values, based on spirituality, religion. Here we shall be talking of Christian, as well as Islamic values. And the major point of distinction here, in my opinion, is that we do not, under these circumstances, in any way repeat the mistakes of the European Union, we do not wander off into multiculturalism that leads to a confusion of notions. We allow the cooperation of peoples and countries to develop on the basis of partnership, on the basis of mutual respect and complementarity. This is the principle point of which we are speaking. We are speaking of the prospect of a Union of sovereign democracies. We adhere to this notion. It was born in the early 2000s. And I think that this is also the principle that can serve as basis for developing our relations and our integration.³¹

Culture and culturally defined “values” are, thus, an alternative way of defining Eurasian regional integration. Economic integration is thus understood as a path toward the “Eurasia of values.”³² The Russian conservative discourse, operating with the ideology of “values” and “spirituality,” effectively competes with the neoliberal image of a homogenous space. This conservative discourse works to produce an alternative, heterogeneous spatiality. It tries to capture and redefine the construct of a Eurasian region which the depoliticized economic discourse originally installed.

³¹ CSKP: Stenogramma konferentsii na temy: ‘Razvitiye cherez integratsiyu. Rossiyskiy proekt dlya Evrazii’ [CSCP: Transcript of the conference on “Development through integration. Russian project for Eurasia”]. CSCP, October 28, 2011. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11360/>. Accessed December 16, 2014.

³² Tsennostnaya paradigma ustoychivogo razvitiya [The axiological paradigm of sustainable development]. CSCP, July 12, 2012. <http://www.cscp.ru/articles/11542/>. Accessed January 3, 2015.

There are thus in fact two competing discourses. Attempts to reappropriate the Eurasian construct and to fill it with politicized difference evolve in parallel with the unfolding of the depoliticized discourses on “Greater Europe.” Shortly after Putin’s seminal article on Eurasian integration voices arose from the Russian expert community, concerned with what it perceived as a lack of ideology. Russia, argued Sergei Mikheev can either wait forever “in line” to join the West and be allowed to play second fiddle, or it can create an alternative center of development. In the latter case the Eurasian Union will need a vision:

If the Eurasian Union will not possess an ideology, it will not make it with economic factors only. This system of values does not necessarily need to be in conflict with the Western doctrines or to follow them. It must be an alternative, and it must be attractive enough. Russia will have to elaborate it in the future.³³

In this line of thought policy advice also came from partisan think tanks to overcome economic depoliticization of Eurasian integration and to formally institutionalize a distinctive set of Eurasian values as part of the regional project:

The Euro-Asiatic Union must do what the West did: formalize, institutionalize its own cultural and historical traditions, axiomatic reference points, the experience of interaction between state and society. The contradiction should be overcome between the policy of “economizing” state-to-state relations in the Union and the appeals to remember the common cultural-historical past, common roots, etc. “Economization” and “pragmatizing” of rela-

³³ Mikheev is the director general of the Center for Political Conjuncture of Russia, “one of the main institutes of expertise in Russia and among the top five institutes most referenced by the media” (Laruelle 2009). The quotation is from a 2012 discussion as reported by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*: *Myagkaya sila: v ‘Narodnom klube’ obsudili stat’yu prem’era* [Soft power: “Popular Club” discussed the premier’s article]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, February 29, 2012. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/02/29/klub.html>. Accessed December 21, 2014.

tions precludes one from drawing on the gigantic body of cultural and historical experience.³⁴

This conservative establishment discourse also put the prospective relations between the would-be Eurasian Union and its primary constitutive other, the EU, in the context of values. As United Russia's National Institute for Development of Contemporary Ideology argued, the social-conservative community had to become capable of maintaining a "healthy dialog" with the West, however not from the position of its "pupils." Neither it was to grow into a confrontation, however. Instead, the think tank authors suggested, Russia's position had to be one of "its own, social-conservative ideology":

Russia must offer the world community as a whole and Europe as its closest foreign partner, its own vision of meaning [videniye smyslov]. And this should be social-conservative values—as the necessary precondition of mutual recognition and, consequently, firm trust between the two parts of the continent. This is necessary also for the future partnership between the EU and the Eurasian Union.³⁵

In its stance on Europe Russian conservative discourses tended to remain traditionally ambiguous. They implicitly distinguished between something referred to as "classical European values" and the contemporary state of affairs in the European Union. This distinction underpins the gender geopolitics of othering Europe as the so-called "Gayropa," i.e., a Europe that is morally degenerate and has lost touch with its own traditions, the original or authentic Christian European values.

³⁴ Osnovnye problemy garmonizatsii pravovogo, finansovo-ekonomicheskogo, informatsionnogo prostranstv Evraziyskogo soyuza [Main problems of the harmonization of the legal, financial, economic, informational spaces of the Eurasian Union]. 2012. NIDCI <http://www.nirsinirsi.appspot.com/Foreign-Policy/n164/evras05.07.pdf/>. Accessed October 20, 2014.

³⁵ Platform of the Russian Social-Conservative Union, announced by United Russia and All-Russia People's Front in 2011. Available from: Programmnye tezisy Rossiyskogo Sotsial'no-Konservativnogo Soyuz (RSKS) [Platform of the Russian Social-Conservative Union (RSCU)]. CSPP, December 23, 2012. <http://cscp.ru/news/11421/>. Accessed November 30, 2014.

These practices of othering also grow increasingly more vivid and picturesque as one descends from the level of official discourse to more informal genres. For example, a rhymed headline in the popular tabloid *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* represented Ukraine's alternative of choosing between Eurasian and European integrations respectively as the choice between a "common home" and "the EuroSodom [Ukraina vybirayet: v obshiy s Rossiyei dom ili v EvroSodom]."³⁶ An article explaining along similar lines why Armenia supposedly prefers Russia to the EU cites an Armenian politician: "'Gender equality, which the EU is imposing on us, is when a mother enters her bedroom and sees her husband in bed with her daughter. This is how it will end—with incest and pedophilia,' said Armenian member of parliament Artashes Gegamyan in a shivering voice." Further down, two Armenian officers are portrayed as having a dialog, captioned: "We can cure a bribe-taking man but not a gay one":

I was drinking vodka with a customs officer. [...] After one bottle he became ardent and started saying: "We need to look to progressive Europe. There is progress there. Civilization. In Russia there is corruption. We do not need that." Then I ask him: Tell me honestly, do you take bribes? He wavered for a long time and then confessed: "Yes, I do." And then I say to him: "Look, you are such vermin, bribe taker—and still I am sitting here and drinking vodka with you. We are feeling good. Why? Because we can reeducate you. There is hope. You are not a doomed man. Or prison may reeducate you. But could I be sitting and drinking vodka with a gay man? No! I feel sorry for him as a cripple, but a leopard cannot change its spots [gorbatogo mogila ispravit]. There is nothing to talk to him about. A 'gender equality' man is not an Armenian man." The customs officer pondered, had a shot of vodka, and says: "You are right, brother. The European way is not for us."³⁷

³⁶ Ukraina vybirayet: v obshchii s Rossiyei dom ili v EvroSodom [Ukraine chooses between the common home with Russia and the "EuroSodom"]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, August 19, 2013. <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26121.5/3014240/>. Accessed October 19, 2014

³⁷ Aslamova, Darya. 2013. Pochemu Armeniya vybrala Rossiyu, a ne Evropu [Why Armenia chose Russia over Europe]. Part 1. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, October 16. <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26146/3035491/>. Accessed October 19, 2014.

Apparently, these tabloid representations are only the tip of the iceberg, as far as Russian society is concerned. Recent research on Russian social networks suggests that in 2013–2014, that is, in the run up to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership summit and immediately after it, they were rife with images portraying a geopolitical choice as an ethical one, with synonymies growing common between homosexuality and drug abuse or homosexuality and pedophilia (see Gaufman 2017).

These unofficial representations are anchored in what Shafutdinova calls the official ideological turn to “morality politics.” The turn was marked by Putin’s return to office with a new mission, as “guardian of Russia’s traditional values, morals and spirituality” and as a “champion of conservative values” (Sharafutdinova 2014, pp. 615–616). The securitization of sex and family relations in Russia was performed not only discursively, but through legal measures, by increased establishment activism in issues like foreign adoption and juvenile justice. Gender issues also became part of the geopolitical discourse on values. Thus, the notion of Gayropa was “bound up with a traditional, perceived opposition between Russia and Europe,” as Riabov and Riabova argue. The discourse reinvents Dostoyevsky’s old idea about “two Europes.” Russia is presented as the successor to the true and authentic Europe. It is the guardian of European Christian values to whom many Europeans, who now live in a “degenerate” Europe, look with hope (Riabov and Riabova 2014).

The “classical European” or “traditional” values in the conservative discourse thus ultimately function as an imagined shared normative enterprise for the two integrations. In line with the ambiguity that civilizational discourses also demonstrate toward the European Other, the Russian conservative discourse partially identifies Russia with (classical) European values, and, at the same time emphasizes Russia’s axiological distinctness and originality. The latter is performed through negative othering of the contemporary European Union as a Europe that has “lost its way” and fallen into normative degeneration.

The conservative bid to ideologize Eurasian integration is anchored in notions of a heterogeneous global space. Unlike the homogenous space imagined by neoliberal discourses of continental integration, this heterogeneous space is divided into axiologically distinct “great areas,” each with its own system of culturally defined values. Also, unlike a global space that is imagined in purely realist

terms, this particular version of multipolarity requires a sort of ideological self-sufficiency or independence which is a token of international status. It invites Russia to assume the role of something referred to by United Russia think tankers as “a pole of meaning”: “Having become ‘a pole of meaning’ for its neighbors, Russia can be a fully fledged pole of the multipolar world, and that is difficult to achieve without Eurasian integration.”³⁸

However, these quasi-civilizational conservative discourses are not the only ones to compete with neoliberal images of homogenous continental space. Politicized interpretations of Eurasian integration also stem from a realist image that tend to make zero-sum as opposed to positive-sum game assumptions about how regionalism works. In this type of narrative, the logic of relations between regions is not portrayed as one of a mutually beneficial cooperation, but as one of a ruthless Hobbesian struggle. For example, the excerpt from the interview with Borodin, cited above, represents Eurasian integration as the only guarantee that Russia’s natural resources and its “vast lands” will not be preyed on by the resource-hungry EU and China. “The territory of Eurasia,” reminded Shuvalov during a 2013 United Russia think tank roundtable, “is to a considerable extent a depository of resources, natural resources, ecological resources, for which the struggle is beginning. There are resources of the Caspian area, the resources of Siberia, of the northern territories. This is why delaying the discussion of the Eurasian dimension and of the Russian project of Eurasianism is fatal for Russia.”³⁹ Integrating Eurasia is presented as an existential necessity, predetermined by structural pressures. “There are only two ways the situation can develop in the post-Soviet space,” warns the Social-Conservative Union platform: “either a full-fledged macroregion will

³⁸ Programmnye tezisy Rossiyskogo Sotsial’no-Konservativnogo Soyuza (RSKS) [Platform of the Russian Social-Conservative Union (RSCU)]. CSPP, December 23, 2012. <http://cscp.ru/news/11421/>. Accessed November 30, 2014.

³⁹ CSKP: Stenogramma kruglogo stola “Evraziyskaya obshchestvennaya integratsiya. Novye perspektivy i vozmozhnosti” [CSPC: Transcript of the round table on “Eurasian societal integration. New perspectives and opportunities”]. CSPC, April 3, 2013. <http://www.cskp.ru/discussion/10000199/11607/>. Accessed January 15, 2015.

form here, or the post-Soviet space will be dragged apart into other macroregions.”⁴⁰

These politicizing narratives can be classified as realist because they emphasize conflict of materially conceived interests between the “great areas” rather than a conflict of their values. The realist-minded approaches also come to attack the depoliticized neoliberal versions of Eurasian regionalism for being naïve and unhelpful. Mikhail Leontiev, a popular political commentator on Russian state television, and a passionate practitioner of geopolitical thinking for the masses, complained in an interview to *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that Eurasian integration was happening in a “degenerated” form of “custom unions.” In his opinion a good start could only be an explicitly political start:

Never and nowhere, starting from ancient times, did integration begin with economics. That includes the famous European Union. There would be no such thing as a European Union if there was no NATO umbrella over it. Only a military-political alliance can secure general political discipline, in the first place, and in the second place, can avoid turning elite disputes, including sharp economic antagonisms, into political confrontation. An example—not the most ideal one—is the union with Belarus, with whom we have a stable military-political alliance. National elites of the post-Soviet countries position themselves only vis-à-vis Russia and against Russia. Otherwise, their existence is altogether meaningless. It is the basis of their identity. Look at [former president of Ukraine] Kuchma, who wrote an idiotic book titled *Ukraine Is Not Russia*. But if Ukraine is not Russia, you do not need to write a thousand page book about that.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Programmnye tezisy Rossiyskogo Sotsial’no-Konservativnogo Soyuza (RSKS) [Platform of the Russian Social-Conservative Union (RSCU)]. CSPP, December 23, 2012. <http://cscp.ru/news/11421/>. Accessed November 30, 2014.

⁴¹ Mikhail Leontiev: „Esli SShA tak nervno reagiruyut, znachit, u nikh est’ osnovaniya boyat’sa vozrozhdeniya SSSR“ [Mikhail Leontiev: „If the USA reacts so nervously, it means they have reasons to be afraid of the USSR revival“]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, December 28, 2012. <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26009/2933611/>. Accessed December 1, 2014.

This “raw” geopolitical realist thinking does away with many ideological assumptions of the neoliberal Eurasian regionalism, and in particular, with the assumption that post-Soviet states are sovereign nations that willingly pursue their integration choices. This discourse can probably be seen as occupying the other end of the spectrum of politicization, as compared to the depoliticized narrative on Eurasian integration as an integral part of global economic governance. It is not part of the official rhetoric that we see in Putin’s seminal 2011 article, but it is also representative of Russian foreign policy discourses and can be deemed equally influential, if not more influential. Consider that Leontiev’s interview appears in a widely read tabloid and his systematic geopolitical commentary enjoys a broad audience on state television.

Neither the realist, nor the conservative discourses on Eurasian integration have been part of the initial master articulations of Eurasian regionalism which are contained in Putin’s 2011 policy article about the future “Eurasian Union” and in other official documents. They do, however, attest to the existence of rival discourses that challenge the official depoliticization strategy and provide alternative interpretations of Eurasian integration as an identity-production frame or the key nodal point of this political project.

The emergence of these discourses suggests the significance of Eurasian economic regionalism as an identitary project, which the depoliticized language of neoliberal integration initially camouflages. It also points to multiple competing discourses inside the discourse of the broadly understood ruling class. This suggests that, despite following the broad frames that are installed in a top-down manner and serve it as nodal points, the ruling-class discourse itself remains heterogeneous. Furthermore, investigation of competing strands in establishment discourse may potentially connect them to the various establishment groups with different and, perhaps, even conflicting material and ideological preferences which shape Russian identity in a number of different ways. This, however, should be the subject of a separate analysis.

Conclusion

The Ukraine crisis naturally had the effect of shock and awe on the policy and scholarly communities dealing with Russia and the post-Soviet world. Yet, as this book demonstrates, it may have been less of a surprise, if more attention had been paid to the gradual crystallization of the anti-Western exceptionalism that was part and parcel of establishment identity-building strategies in the antecedent years. The crisis was a moment of rupture but, as seen in retrospective, it was also building up slowly. I adopted the mid-aughts as the beginning of the seven-year reference period for this study, but some would probably argue that it goes some twenty years back or more, all the way to the early post-Soviet period, thus naturally evoking in mind the title of E. H. Carr's international relations classic.

The ambition of this book should therefore not be overstated. It should not be taken as a claim that the examined identity-building practices of the Russian establishment were the sole cause of the crisis. The causality issue, as we know all too well, is the Achilles heel of constructivist analyses. The mechanisms of decision-making are set in motion not only by identities but also by a rational calculus that is responsive to the evolving environment and the multiplicity of actors that inhabit it. Thus, the last thing I meant to do was to tell a deterministic story about how the Russian identity path dependence had set Russia on a course of inevitable collision with the West in Ukraine.

Yet, decisions when examined from a strictly rationalist perspective do not provide a complete picture. A realist analysis, for example, is

ultimately unable to explain why the West has to be a threat to something often dubbed as Russia's legitimate interests or a *natural* sphere of influence. How and why the perception of these "legitimate interests" is constituted, and how the geopolitical spaces of influence are socially constructed, is a question that IR scholars should also preoccupy themselves with.

That, in turn, is impossible without delving into the deeper cultural context that largely remains under the radar of those approaches, which assume a universal rationality of international actors. My argument is therefore that the existing Russian perception of "interest" and "security" is interlinked with something we could perhaps call alternative identities. These alternative identities are reproduced alongside Russia's official identity as a federalized Westphalian nation-state. They are built around notions of Russia as a supranational entity or region, understood in cultural civilizationist terms, or in geoeconomic terms—or both at the same time. The documented overlapping of regionalist discourses attests to their structural similarity and, indeed, deeper affinity that may not be evident at a glance.

Considering this overlap may also have important implications outside of the purely academic debate and as seen from the perspective of a broader policy community. In a 2014 policy essay Krastev and Leonard suggested the EU should grant the Eurasian Economic Union peer recognition as the best chance to "shift the competition between Russia and the West back onto an economic field rather than a military one" (Krastev and Leonard 2014). The advantage of the EEU, they argued, was that it was built on the principles of inclusiveness and economic interdependence rather than Russian ethnic nationalism. There is certainly some intuitive truth to this argument. The discourse of Eurasian economic regionalism has much less potential to breeding aggressive anti-Western sentiment in Russia as compared to the ethnonationalist interpretations of Russian civilization. Unlike some of the more radical versions of the Russian world discourse it respects, at least in theory, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other post-Soviet states.

The devil, however, may be hiding in the details. As this book demonstrates, the geopolitical meanings that permeate the Russian discourse of Eurasian regionalism are so strong that, in practice, they set the project of a "Eurasian Union" rather far away from the purely technocratic and depoliticized agendas. That is why issues of economy

so rapidly turn into issues of security and the conflict of depoliticized economic frameworks leads to a military conflict in the EU-Russia common neighborhood.

Ortmann (2011) suggested that the Russian rulers under Putin adopted a narrative on their country's great power status as a kind of a "self-referential activity" that legitimizes their grip on power even more in their own eyes than in the eyes of the broader public. In the same vein, the narrative on the future Eurasian union was largely elite driven. Economic regionalism may have lacked the powerful images and the nativist nationalistic appeal of the Russian world, as suggested even by the occasional dismissive remarks on the customs union as a "degenerate" form of restoring Greater Russia (see Chapter 7). Nevertheless, the discourse of Eurasian regionalism seemed to convince the Russian establishment once again of their exceptionalism and their entitlement to parity or equal status with their Western Other.

The meaning attached to economic integration hereby carries more value than the regional economic integration per se. And understanding this elite "self-referential" activity is key to understanding Russia's strategic behavior. Sampling elite discourse is important because of how Russian political life is organized and how strategic decisions are made. The ruling class traditionally plays a leading role and the public tends mostly to catch up. In that sense, little has changed in Russia over the past centuries.

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